

THE MANAGEMENT OF TRUANCY

Sheila E Henderson



PhD  
University of Edinburgh  
1987

I hereby declare that the thesis has been composed by  
myself and that the work it contains is entirely my own.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I should like to express my thanks to the many people involved in dealing with non-attendance in the Region, who allowed me access to their organisations, allowed me to examine documents and gave me a great deal of their time during the observation and interview periods. Without naming particular individuals, this included the Headteachers and guidance staff of the four schools, those parents and teachers on their respective Attendance Committees, the Regional Reporter and his staff, Children's Panel members and the Senior Summary Depute and Procurators Fiscal.

Thanks are also due to Dr Ian Dey and Mr Michael Adler for their supervision of the research and to John Gray, Sheffield University, for computing advice. Many other friends and relatives gave a great deal of support and help at various stages. Their contributions were indispensable and much appreciated.

## ABSTRACT

A concern with attempting to understand and explain the causes of truancy and to offer a "solution" which might reduce the numbers of pupils absent from schools has dominated work in the area of non-attendance. Little has been done to examine those agencies which "process" non-attenders, nor to consider their actual decision-making.

This clearly constitutes an important area of investigation, as the bodies involved are several and varied and their decisions likely to have significant effects on the pupils involved. The legislation governing their operation provides considerable scope for interpretation and the use of discretion by the groups may be based on assumptions about both education and deviance. Literature on education points to three views of the system: "traditional"; "liberal" and "controlling". Four associated responses to deviance are identifiable: "corrective"; "welfare-based"; "educational reform" and "laissez-faire".

The aim of the study is thus to examine the agencies' decision-making in terms of their orientation in relation to such issues and to describe their practical operation. Chapter 1, therefore, identifies the possible responses to truancy and Chapter 2 the legislation and apparent remit of each agency. Chapter 3 outlines the method used and the findings are presented in Chapters 4 - 10, beginning with the schools and moving chronologically through the other agencies.

Finally, the emergent patterns of decision-making and response are related back to the initial typology, identifying the nature and implications of "The Management of Truancy" in practice.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Studies of Truancy	2
The Approach and Aims	5
<b>1 SCHOOLS, NON-ATTENDANCE AND DEVIANCE</b>	<b>9</b>
The Nature of Discretion	9
The Basis of Discretionary Decision Making	11
1. Assumptive Worlds and Social Rules	11
The Use of Assumptive Worlds in Policy Examination	13
VIEWS OF SCHOOL	15
1.The Traditional View	15
2.The Liberal View	17
3.The Schools as Social Control View	19
RESPONSES TO NON-ATTENDANCE	21
1.The Correctional Response	21
2.The Welfare Response	23
3.Educational Reform	26
4.Laissez-Faire	29
Summary	29
<b>2 THE NON-ATTENDANCE PROCESS</b>	<b>31</b>
The Process	33
Part 2 - The Apparent Focus of the Agencies	36
School Guidance Departments	36
The Vertical System	38
The Horizontal System	38
School Attendance Committees	38
The Children's Hearing System	41
The Operation of the System	43
The Procurator Fiscal	44
Overview	46
<b>3 METHOD</b>	<b>48</b>
The Aims of the Study	48
THE METHOD	49
1. The Use of Observation	50
2. The Use of Interviews	52
3. The Use of Records	54
THE RESEARCH PROCESS	54
Gaining Access	55
The Schools	57
Oakbank	57
Ashdale	58
Birchwood	59
Bayview	59
The School Attendance Committees	60
The Reporter's Department	61
The Procurators Fiscal	63
Recording the Data	64

The Data Analysis	65
<b>4 Oakbank</b>	<b>68</b>
POLICY AND PURPOSES	68
The School	68
The Guidance Structure	71
Non-Attendance Options	72
PRACTICE	73
The Detection Process	73
Internal School Actions	75
Formal External Measures	81
<b>5 Ashdale</b>	<b>89</b>
POLICY AND PURPOSES	89
The School	89
Guidance Structure	91
Non-Attendance Options	92
PRACTICE	92
The Detection Process	92
Internal School Actions	95
Formal External Measures	99
<b>6 Birchwood</b>	<b>106</b>
POLICY AND PURPOSES	106
The School	106
Guidance Structure	108
Non-Attendance Options	109
PRACTICE	110
The Detection Process	111
Internal School Actions	114
Formal External Measures	118
<b>7 Bayview</b>	<b>126</b>
POLICY AND PURPOSES	126
The School	126
The Guidance Structure	130
Non-Attendance Options	130
PRACTICE	131
The Detection Process	131
Internal School Actions	135
Formal External Measures	140
THE SCHOOLS : AN OVERVIEW	148
<b>8 SCHOOL ATTENDANCE COMMITTEES</b>	<b>150</b>
Practical Organisation and Procedures	150
Members	150
The Conduct of the Meetings	153
The Disposals	162
Continued Cases	164

Attendance Order	166
Referral to the Reporter	167
The Procurator Fiscal	170
The Reporter and the Procurator Fiscal	172
Desert	173
<b>9 THE REPORTER</b>	<b>174</b>
FUNCTIONS	174
PRACTICE	175
Receipt of a Referral	175
The Collection of Information	178
No Further Action	181
Discussions With the Family	182
Voluntary Measures	185
Referral to a Hearing	186
<b>10 THE HEARINGS – PANEL MEMBERS</b>	<b>188</b>
The Hearing Process	188
PRACTICE	190
The Hearing Process	190
The Decision to Discharge a Referral	195
Adjourn	197
Home Supervision	200
Residential Supervision	201
<b>11 THE PROCURATOR FISCAL/COURT ACTION</b>	<b>203</b>
FUNCTIONS	203
PRACTICE	205
The Information Available	205
The Decision To Take No Proceedings	207
The Warning Letter	211
The Decision to Prosecute	212
Court Cases	215
THE AGENCIES – An Overview	218
<b>12 CONCLUSION</b>	<b>219</b>
The Traditional Response	219
The Liberal Response	222
The Laissez-Faire Response	225
The Educational Reform Response	227
Implications	228
The Conflict	229
Implications	230
A Punitive Approach	232
A Welfare Approach	234
Summary	236
An Alternative View	236
Policy Implications : Two Levels of Action	240
Changing the "Worlds" – A Cautionary Note	243
BIBLIOGRAPHY	248

<b>I APPENDIX 1 : THE QUESTIONNAIRE</b>	<b>258</b>
THE GUIDANCE STAFF	258
Details of School	258
General Attitude to School	258
Attitude to the Causes of Truancy	259
The Focus of Concern	259
The Response	259
Use of Discretion	260
Overall Role	260

## INTRODUCTION AND AIMS OF THE STUDY

In recent years there has been a growing concern with pupils who do not achieve regular school attendance, prompting many studies of truancy, and the establishment in Scotland in July 1974 of a government committee (The Pack Committee) to:

*inquire into truancy and discipline among primary and secondary school pupils in Scotland; to consider what measures can be taken by the school, and by the school with the help of other services, to reduce these problems. (S.E.D., 1977)*

The perceived need for such a committee stemmed from two concerns: a general concern among education authorities, teachers' associations and the public about unruly pupils and a widespread concern about truancy, assumed to be:

*an early indication that a child is beginning to go off the rails  
(S.E.D. 1977)*

Their concern, therefore, was to attempt to isolate the causes of truancy and thereby point to practical solutions, considerations which have consistently dominated truancy research. This study is concerned rather with the processing of truancy, the concerns of the decision-makers who must deal with the pupils and the outcomes in terms of the courses of action chosen. Before outlining this in more detail, however, some of the existing material will be examined, to provide an overview of the variety of possible views of, and responses to, non-attendance, as well as highlighting the lack of attention paid to the actual management process.

## Studies of Truancy

Attempts to understand and explain truancy have been many and varied, citing a variety of social and educational causes. Examinations of patterns of truancy have provided some information about the nature and extent of the "problem", although as Reid (1985) points out:

*most researchers now agree that valid and reliable measures of attendance are very difficult to obtain and interpret.*

Whilst the actual number of pupils failing to attend school is difficult to measure, some patterns have been identified. It has been discovered, for example, that girls are more frequently absent than boys at secondary school, (Douglas and Ross, 1968; Fogelman and Richardson, 1974) but the cause of absence is more likely to be truancy among boys (Tyerman, 1968). The peak age for truancy is 14 (Shepherd et al, 1971) and the extent of truancy is likely to increase during the last years of compulsory schooling (Gray et al, 1980; Rutter et al, 1979). There is some variation in terms of the time of the week and the time of the year and attendance is likely to reduce towards the end of the week (Trigg, 1975; Jackson, 1978). The majority of studies, however, have attempted to provide explanations for unwillingness to attend school, centring heavily on three areas.

Firstly, psychological explanations have concentrated on describing truancy as a symptom of disturbance in the child and/or the family (Tyerman, 1958; Billington, 1979). While Tyerman categorised truants as lonely, "unhappy" and "insecure", Billington concentrated on the relative "unpopularity" of these pupils. Such research has examined links between anxiety and school refusal and identified "school phobia" as a clinical condition. Reid (1982) linked

truancy with self-concept and argued that :

*the general picture which emerges is of a struggle for identification, survival and affection both at home and at school.*

Suggested solutions which follow from these findings have tended to concentrate on the value of psychological treatment and therapy to overcome the underlying personality problems.

The second area in which explanations have proliferated can broadly be termed social causes. Such research has generally attempted to link aspects of social deprivation to truancy, and has identified several areas in which such a relationship is seen to exist. Truanting pupils have been found to come from families at the lower end of the social scale (Davie et al, 1972; Fogelman and Richardson, 1974; May, 1975; Fogelman et al, 1980), from families with low incomes (Tyerman, 1968; Hodges, 1968; Farrington, 1980; Galloway, 1982), overcrowded homes (Fogelman et al, 1980) and abnormal social conditions (S.E.D., 1977; Tyerman, 1968; Galloway, 1980; Farrington, 1980). As Reid (1985) summarises:

*such pupils, for example, do not normally receive proper parental encouragement and support at home, emanate from backgrounds where books and learning are valued or find themselves with the financial backup necessary to clothe and equip them properly for their education*

The perceived solutions, when truancy is seen in these terms have concentrated on the network of welfare services and the earlier identification of pupils seen to be at risk. They may also involve the utilisation of more formal legal measures to deal with the lack of parental encouragement. (These factors will be discussed in subsequent chapters.)

Finally, a third area in which the causes of truancy have been sought is the educational process itself, with a variety of institutional explanations being attempted. The influence of school organisation, ethos and practice has been examined (Reynolds, 1976; Reynolds et al, 1980; Rutter et al, 1979) with the suggestion that a good school ethos, low institutional control, less rigorous rule enforcement and close parent-school relationships could foster higher attendance levels. The effect of school practice has also been cited by Hargreaves et al, (1975), Auld, (1976), Galloway et al, (1982), and Grunsell, (1980). Further educational explanations have located the causes of truancy in the actual process of schooling, suggesting that the behaviour is the result of conflict between the values of working class pupils and the school, and the institutional attempts to enforce school control (Willis, 1978; White, 1980; Grunsell, 1980; Corrigan, 1979; Fogelman and Richardson, 1974).

Clearly the search for a solution has been widespread. A further factor pointing to the need for research stems from the fact that all these studies point to the existence of a range of perceptions and similarly a range of solutions. There is clearly a great deal of controversy surrounding the best means of dealing with truancy and the response chosen must reflect to an extent perception of the cause. In practical terms, the law allows considerable scope for those involved in the process to interpret the courses of action available in the light of their views. The statutory processes for dealing with pupils who fail to attend school are contained within two pieces of legislation – The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 and the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968. Both allow for a series of possible options ranging from “welfare” based measures such as referral to the Reporter to the Children’s Panel, to the prosecution of parents in court. The process may also involve a variety of personnel – school guidance staff; school attendance committees; Reporters;



panel members and Procurators Fiscal, each of whom has the opportunity to exercise discretion in dealing with pupils. Although there have been, in fact, some attempts to consider the operation of some of these separate groups, for example school guidance systems (Fletcher, 1980; Best et al, 1980,1983); children's hearings (Martin et al, 1981) and Procurators Fiscal (Moody and Tombs,1982), none have concentrated solely on truancy and none on the entire process. Although Reid (op cit) and Galloway (op cit) outline some of the procedures, this constitutes only a small proportion of their accounts and deals only with England and Wales, where procedures differ considerably from those in Scotland. The need for further research is thus implied:

*The ways in which school attendance has been investigated reflect the varied interests and priorities involved... many research projects have provided useful insights into limited aspects of the problem, yet both the sheer quantity of research and the range of the methodologies that have been used merely underline the complexity of the topic.*

The present study was therefore based on two concerns: firstly the lack of available research into the actual process for dealing with truanting pupils, and secondly, the existence of a range of possible views and actions implied by the literature and the law, posing questions about the exercise of discretion by those concerned. Some examination of the factors guiding the disposals was thus considered to be an important area on enquiry, hence a study of the management of truancy.

### **The Approach and Aims**

The study concentrates, as stated, on the procedures used with truanting pupils but is not restricted merely to describing the methods used in each case. Given that the starting point for the investigation was the

existence not only of many but also of different perceptions of the nature of truantiing behaviour, it seemed appropriate to highlight related types of response. This was aided by the existence of the two separate pieces of legislation, each approaching the problem from a different philosophical basis. From this it became clear that the possible courses of action were broadly of two types; "welfare based" solutions (concentrating on help and treatment) and "corrective" solutions (based on punishment and deterrence). Finally, it was also logically possible to envisage two further response types, in the form of "educational reform" and a "laissez faire" response, (the latter based either in the view that available courses of action were inappropriate, or rooted in an unwillingness to respond). These four "types" also appeared to encompass the range of alternatives implied by the suggested causes and found support in criminological literature as being the range of responses to deviance (see for example Taylor, Walton and Young, 1975).

The overall aim of the study is therefore to identify the stated and actual responses and to use these apparent response types as a guide to analysing the emergent reactions to truancy, examining their relation to the background assumptions and aims of the various groups involved in their use, and to begin to address the "apparent lack of interest in the treatment or management of truancy" (Galloway, 1981). The implications of the findings for those involved and the overall effects of the practical operation of the legislation will be subsequently discussed.

Three questions appear to be centrally important to the examination:

- (a) How do individuals and agencies respond to truantiing pupils in their face to face contacts with them?
- (b) How do individuals and agencies view truancy

and their role in relation to this?

- (c) What factual information is available to the decision maker, and how is this used?

From all these sources a clearer understanding of responses to truancy should emerge.

The study is based on fieldwork in one Scottish Region which took place in the school year 1984/85 and begins with a brief discussion of the definition of discretion adopted and the opportunity provided in managing truancy for the influence of the subjective perceptions of the participants. The areas in which assumptions are likely to be important are then discussed, being, in an examination of non-attendance, education (the nature and purpose of schooling) and deviance (the most appropriate response in terms of the types identified). The use of the existing literature and the identification of specific views in each area made the adoption of a typology a useful framework for the identification of possible ideologies and actions. An outline of the range of views in each of these areas forms the basis of Chapter 1, which identifies three views of schools, and four possible responses to deviance.

The legal provisions for non-attendance are then discussed in detail in Chapter 2, with an examination of both the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 and the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968. The available disposals are then located within the theoretical types of response, with a short discussion of the available literature outlining their nature and purposes. Each stage of the process can therefore be identified as a "type" of response in terms of its stated purpose. This will later be compared to the practical purposes discovered.

Having identified the process in theoretical terms, Chapter 3 then describes the methods used, essentially a combination of observation, record examination and interviews to elicit the views in each area for each group involved in the managing of truancy.

Presentation of the findings is dealt with separately for each group of participants. Four schools in the Region were involved, and Chapters 4 – 7 describe the periods spent in each of their guidance departments. In each case, their stated responses, actual responses and the implications of these responses are considered. Following the process chronologically, Chapter 8 then considers the operation of School Attendance Committees, Chapter 9 the Children's Hearing System, Chapter 10 the Children's Hearing Panel members and Chapter 11 the Procurator Fiscal.

The concluding Chapter (Chapter 12) then draws together the emergent response patterns in order to provide an overview of what, in practice, occurs in the management of truancy in the Region, and to point to some of the consequences of the use of discretion in an area in which a variety of conflicting assumptions and beliefs can be found.

## CHAPTER 1

### SCHOOLS, NON-ATTENDANCE AND DEVIANCE

This study is concerned with the responses to truancy which can be identified in the agencies involved, with the nature of their decisions and the eventual outcomes. The ability to "choose" between different types of action rests on the existence of discretion for those involved, and this forms the starting point for the study, providing, by its existence the circumstances in which the resultant options can emerge.

The course of action adopted by any agency dealing with any issue in a system which is open to interpretation will be affected by many factors. To examine some of the factors which might influence the course of action adopted by agencies dealing with truancy, it is necessary to examine alternative views of the nature of schooling and the causes of truancy and to begin to identify some possible approaches. This will serve as the basis against which to examine their actual operation. An examination of possible views of and reactions to law-breaking also identifies available responses. An attempt to locate the apparent and actual responses in such a context forms the basis of the task.

This must be preceded, however, by a brief account of the nature of discretion, which, as suggested, underpins the non-attendance legislation, and provides an opportunity for the conflicting views to find expression in practice.

#### **The Nature of Discretion**

In a system governed by clear rules, the question of the nature of the action taken would not arise. An agency or official would have a prescribed

rather than at best implied function, and the operation of the tasks could be explained in terms of this. It is the existence of discretion which leaves the "management of truancy" open to the "influences" alluded to, hence the need for a working definition of discretion at the outset. Whilst there has been a large body of writing on the nature of discretion, it will suffice here to outline the adopted definition and to then concentrate on suggested influences on its use, the central aim of the thesis.

K.C. Davis (Davis, 1971) describes discretion as follows :

*a public official has discretion whenever the effective limits of his power leave him free to make a choice among possible courses of action or inaction.*

This is further developed by Adler and Asquith, (1980), who go on to suggest that such decisions are generally outwith the remit of legal scrutiny. They describe a continuum with rigid rules at one extreme, discretionary decision making at the other and a corresponding variation in how visible and explicit the decision making process will be. Various other attempts at definition have been made, providing further insight into the composition of such decisions, but all rest on the basic notion of the freedom to choose between courses of action.

Watson, (1980) for example, also draws on the distinction between strict legalism and discretion, while Bankowski and Nelken (1980) describe discretion simply as :

*the liberty or power of deciding*

and Young, (1980), considering some of the problems discretion poses in the implementation of policy, sees it as the process by which decision makers operate :

*the interpretation of formal rules, the creation of informal guidelines and the exercise of preferences within them comprise a set of subjective factors which enable discretionary decision makers to make sense of and operate upon their everyday world.*

It seems the basic premise from which to identify the existence of discretion is the opportunity for the decision maker to choose between available alternatives without applying strict rules to the situation :

*an officer who decides what to do or not to do often (1) finds facts, (2) applies law and (3) decides what is desirable in the circumstances. The third of these functions is customarily called the exercise of discretion. (Young 1980)*

### **The Basis of Discretionary Decision Making**

As suggested, the concern in this thesis is to examine the use of the available discretion , and it is to possible influences on the process that the outline must now turn, as :

*we must consider not only the rules that define actors' power, but also the purposes and preferences that shape the choices made in its name. (Young 1980)*

Davis, (1971) suggests three elements in the decision making process – facts, values and influences, going on to suggest that, in practice, these are seldom separated, and most such judgements are intuitive. The decision is thus located in a set of personal beliefs which can usefully be described with reference to what Young has termed “assumptive worlds”.

#### **1. Assumptive Worlds and Social Rules**

It is in the context of these factors, therefore, that the resultant decision is seen to be best understood and it is within the subjective “definitions of the situation” that explanation for the decisions made should be

sought.

In an attempt to understand the influences on decision makers, this view emphasises the importance of values, perceptions and motivations held by those involved as a basis for understanding their actions. Young (1980) suggests that :

*within this are integrated the values, beliefs and perceptions the individual has of the world he acts upon.*

Thus, he suggests :

*.....purposive action, as distinct from routine or compliant action, can only be understood in the context of the situationally embedded actor.*

The actor's perspective :

*draws attention to the centrality of the subjective dimension in the transmission of policy intentions and in the exercise of de facto discretion. That subjective dimension apparent in the appreciative gaps or conflicting definitions of the situation that characterise the inter and intra agency relations, demands the systematic exploration of the assumptive worlds.*

A similar point is made by Watson (1980) who suggests that the individual concerned will act in a manner appropriate to his social identity in order to make his behaviour intelligible. Adler and Asquith (1980) further point out the importance of professional conceptions and ideologies as a component of these "assumptive worlds" and possible determinants in the decision process. All these background assumptions, cultural values and perceptions of the situation constitute the guiding factors in the choice made by the decision maker.



## The Use of Assumptive Worlds in Policy Examination

The concept of the assumptive world, as outlined, provides a useful starting point for the analysis of the practical operation of discretion in the non-attendance legislation, offering a focus for the examination. As Young goes on to point out, the influence of the background assumptions can subsequently affect the practical operation of a policy and lead to instances of differential interpretation of legislation. As he points out :

*the impact of policies is affected as much by the mediation of other key actors - the implementers - as by the intrinsic merits or feasibility of the policy itself.*

This takes place as the "implementers" :

*place their own construction upon central advice or directives. Within their "interpretive space", central intentions may be assimilated, ignored or inverted, response to them is essentially discretionary.*

The crucial starting point, therefore, for the examination of "the management of truancy" rests on the notion that :

*practical policy analysis must be informed by an understanding of these subjective factors and their situational determinants.*

This requires the identification of :

*the dimensions of the assumptive world.....that are relevant....*

these being :

*.....those that pertain to his policy system role....rather than those that pertain to his other social roles.*

Two areas in relation to non-attendance, as suggested in the Introduction are

immediately apparent as being of particular importance. These relate to the participant's role and assumptions in relation to education and the participant's role and assumptions in relation to deviance, the two areas covered by the relevant attendance legislation. If an attempt to identify and describe the decisions and responses is to be made then the various possible "definitions of the situation" in these two central areas must now be presented.

## VIEWS OF SCHOOL

The Pack Report (op cit) states that :

*there are no centrally defined objectives for our schools*

leading to competing conceptions of the nature and purpose of the school-based education process. However, three broad ideologies emerge from the literature to suggest the range of opinion in the debate.

### 1.The Traditional View

The "traditional" view of Scottish education suggests that the school system and the provision of compulsory education are located in a belief that the value of academic learning and the attainment of qualifications constitute what McKenzie (1970) called :

*the traditional job of absorbing knowledge.*

Pupils are required to attend school as a means of acquiring the academic skills which are seen to be necessary and beneficial, and those who view the schools in these terms argue that this is a reflection of the wider views of society. As McKenzie further states :

*the examination machine, which is a machine to make pupils memorise information gets all the publicity and the policy is promoted widely until nearly all the parents regard the examination system as the same thing as education.*

The goals are also accepted by the teachers, who :

*in the hundred years since education became compulsory in Scotland..... have followed this tradition with docility. (McKenzie, op cit)*

The organisation of the schools under this traditional model is seen

to reflect and support the overall goal of examination success and learning, seeing the school as :

*concerned with the educational development of children. The proper job of the teacher is to teach. (Welton, 1985)*

As Watts, (1973) points out:

*Traditionally, curriculum aims have been centered around the transference, from the teacher to the pupil, of an accepted body of knowledge and an accepted set of values.*

As the system is based on rules, he suggests that a model of discipline follows, wherein a teacher must adopt a position of authority and cannot associate with the personal interests of his/her charges.

*Such a model of learning carried with it an appropriate system of discipline... by whatever means the knowledge is transferred, the teacher is inevitably in the possession of power, knowing what is right, correcting his pupils when wrong... The crucial factor, therefore, in such a dispensation is obedience. (Watts, op cit)*

Boyson, (1973) summarises this concern :

*school discipline is the way a school is organised to ensure that the majority of its pupils gain most benefit by absorbing learning, training themselves for adult life and developing their personalities.*

Brooks, (1973) further points out that subservience to the school rules is brought about through threat, coercion and fear, and a clearly defined system of responses to rule breaking must exist. As Watts (op cit) adds :

*From this follows the ritual controls of behaviour that serve also to convey a value system in such a way that it cannot be questioned or modified except by outright rebellion.*

Wadd (1973) describes the traditional staff role :

*the teacher seeking to impose a certain type of order or regime on his class, seeking to bring under his control an area of pupil behaviour as his right to punish and reward.*

The justification is as follows:

*the form of punishment is less important than that there is punishment, both for the sake of the offender and for the deterring of others... to allow a delinquent child to grow up believing he can get away with breaking rules merely encourages the growth of the adult criminal. (Boyson, 1973)*

These are, therefore the essential features of the traditional view of schooling, based on a learning process best served by authoritarian and disciplined schools where, as Fletcher, (1980) states :

*the spiritual development of the child tended to be linked with the qualities of diligence and perseverance.*

The concern within the schools is with those pupils (seen to be the majority) who share these aims and wish to succeed, providing the most appropriate setting within which this can occur, and measuring success in relation to this in terms of the measureable attainments of school pupils.

## **2.The Liberal View**

Fletcher (op cit) suggests that the emergence of an alternative view of the nature of the schooling process developed alongside the growth of the welfare state and the expansion of the caring services. Arguments were developed to suggest that beyond imparting knowledge, schools should provide a rich social environment and preparation for life which should go beyond the simple possession of qualifications.

Attention was drawn to the needs of the individual, the need for relaxation of the authoritarian tradition and the need for all-round preparation

for life. Politically, the ideology of "equal opportunity" became popular, with the idea of education as providing "social justice" providing equality of access to schools and enhancing the development of young people. Education becomes a "total experience" to right the injustices of society. (Best et al, 1980)

The emphasis in this view, therefore, is less on the attainment of measureable success than on pupil development, less on the fostering of respect for authority than on the creation of a happy environment, and less on the preoccupation with a rigid structure of rules than on an attempt to meet the needs of all pupils, academic and non-academic. As Best et al (op cit) suggest :

*ideals on their own are not enough. They must be translated into practice,*

and teachers are seen to be more than imparters of knowledge, but should be concerned to promote the interests of the children as people, making schools more humane and flexible, and having a curriculum based on a variety of alternatives to accomodate all levels of ability.

In addition, the school will seek to develop relationships with the pupils concerned through a network of caring staff who will "guide" pupils in all aspects of their school lives through their school careers. There is an emphasis on a paternalistic concern for those who do not succeed with the caring staff helping :

*to enable them to make the best use of their particular talents and capabilities in school and later in the adult world. (D.E.S., 1978)*

For these reasons, school education is seen to provide a valuable experience

to the pupils.

### **3.The Schools as Social Control View**

A third identifiable view of the school process is critical of both traditional and liberal views, arguing that both orientations begin from the basic premise of a largely unquestioning acceptance of the value of the institutional provision which prevails. Critics of this assumption take a variety of forms. At a broad structural level, an alternative view of the nature of education is provided by some, viewing it in a structural context as a system through which most pupils are coerced into an acceptance of middle class values and goals, and are prepared for subordinate positions in working life through the internalisation of the required degree of dependence and conformity.

The main aim of the school system is seen thus to become the creation of an obedient and docile working class, the dominant groups using the school system to create an elite, ensuring that some will fail and ensuring an acceptance of this failure. The school thus becomes an agent of social control which supports and perpetuates the existing structure.

Demarco (1977) (in his statement of dissent from the conclusions of the Pack Report) argues that the rights, dignity and authority of the pupils are denied, making schools grim and oppressive places leading to boredom and disaffection.

Willis, (1978) develops this argument further, suggesting that formal education necessitates foregoing the right to self direction, independence and excitement, going on to argue that the values of the school clash with the values of working class culture as a whole (which emphasises self-expression,

individuality and independence).

Fogelman and Richardson, (1974) observe that the dominant values and goals are imposed by schools judging their working class pupils in middle class terms. Thus, they argue, "good english" is based on teachers' conceptions of this, and "general knowledge" is that which corresponds to the school curriculum. Attainment scales are therefore seen to be more likely to reflect the cultural affinity between the child and the school system than the actual skills the pupil may possess.

This has been translated into a need to address the broader inequalities in society and the means by which the predominant system is reproduced. A separate solution is forwarded by the development of arguments for "deschooling" with suggestions such as that by Illich, (1972) that schools should be abolished, to allow self-realisation, through the participation in and access to "learning networks".

A further solution is suggested by White, (1980), who argues that whilst such criticisms directly challenge the nature of education, the existing school model is too solid to be demolished quickly. Thus, he argues, the school system should be amended in an attempt to develop "alternative education programmes", combining free schools, truancy centres, adventure playgrounds and work experience which challenge the basic assumptions inherent in both the traditional (academic) and liberal (adjustment) theories.

This view is shared by Grunsell, (1980), who states that it is of central importance that :

*those receiving education feel that it holds anything useful and valuable for them.*



This will be further discussed in terms of possible responses below.

## RESPONSES TO NON-ATTENDANCE

Along with these three possible ideological views of school, four associated responses to truancy can be isolated (as suggested in the Introduction) from the criminological literature and available procedures.

### 1.The Correctional Response

Parallel to the traditional view of the school process, is a response to deviance wherein non-attendance is seen to be an offence in contravention of the rules of the school. The associated view of the causes of the behaviour will locate this in the child/family attitude, considering truants to be a recalcitrant and "deviant" minority which must be controlled.

Part of the concern again relates to the emphasis on the majority of pupils who are seen to be willing to learn. It is argued under this view that the emergence of non-attendance may indicate a breakdown in :

*the maintainance of an orderly system that creates the conditions in which learning may take place, and that allows the aims and objectives of the school to be realised. (S.E.D., 1977)*

Action is therefore seen to be necessary to halt this process.

The response to deviance which is suggested by the nature of these concerns is, as outlined above, based on sanction and punishment. As Turner (1974) points out with the need under a traditional model to promote rules, those who fail to conform to authority must be punished by pain or inconvenience. The related theoretical position in relation to deviance is what Taylor, Walton and Young, (1973) term :

*traditional, correctionally oriented criminology.*

This, too, is based on the notion of a consensual social order with a minority of deviants on the fringes. The hierarchy is seen to be the basis of law and order and a system of penalties based on the nature of the offence and increasing in severity (the tariff system) is developed.

Rutter and Giller, (1983) outline this in what they call a justice model which :

*assumes that delinquency is a matter of opportunity and choice, that society has the right to assert the norms and standards of behaviour endorsed by society. Accordingly, sanctions and controls are valid responses, with a proportionality between the seriousness of the offence and the sentence given being the predominant concern.*

The philosophy is punitive, based on the view that (a)the behaviour contributes to an undesirable occurrence and (b)is the responsibility of the individuals. The emphasis is on the attribution of guilt to the individual offender and the need for a more stringent system of sanctions both to prevent the recurrence of the behaviour and to act as a deterrent to others.

*In the case of punishment we are dealing with a person because he has engaged in offending conduct, our concern is either to prevent the recurrence of such conduct or inflict what is thought to be deserved pain, or both. (Packer, 1969)*

Specifically in relation to truanting pupils, therefore, the school focus under this view is on controlling non-attendance by making the consequences undesirable. A network of increasingly severe sanctions is implied, to be administered by progressively senior teaching staff and other formal bodies, in relation to the nature of the offence. These processes will also form the basis

of the deterrent function, the non-attender and the consequences of non-attendance being held as an example to others in order to prevent the spread of rule-breaking. The approach stresses the importance of the enforcement of rules and the culpability of the offender by these means.

Ideas of welfare based intervention are rejected :

*it will be a pity if our woolly ideas of liberation of the self mean that we are less successful in training our young to responsible adulthood than in making schools and society playgrounds for the gangster thugs. (Boyson , 1973)*

## 2.The Welfare Response

Instead of focussing on truancy as deliberate rule-breaking, the Liberal view of schooling has its criminological parallel in what Taylor, Walton and Young (op cit) term "Liberal Theory", which has its roots in a commitment to welfare. The causes of non-attendance will be seen to be the result of deprivation, the emphasis being on environment/maladjustment and socialisation.

As seen in the introduction to the research, many of the studies focussing on the causes of truancy have adopted this view, as Gurney, (1980) points out :

*in the struggle to explain classroom chaos and falling academic standards, much importance has been attached to home and social background as key factors in the problem.*

The Pack Report (op cit) concluded that :

*there seems little doubt that family circumstances play the major role in cases of chronic truancy*

identifying as the main causes the types of problem which are seen by such

theorists to be influential – the disruption of relationships, families with many children, poor housing, inadequate income, negative attitudes, unemployment, alcohol problems, all of which may render the family unable to cope.

The families, under this model are seen to need help to deal with problems. The focus is on the individual pupil rather than the effect on the school as a whole, what Garland, (1981) terms the readmission of the outcast. Attention is focussed on the offender rather than the crime in an attempt to make an assessment of his needs and find the appropriate solution.

This welfare based approach is outlined in much of the literature in relation to juvenile justice, as this was an area in which the rehabilitative ideal became dominant. The report of the Kilbrandon Committee (H.M.S.O., 1964) (discussed later specifically in relation to the children's hearings) outlined the central themes. A medical analogy which sees the behaviour as the symptom, assessment of the individual case as the diagnosis and subsequent action as the treatment forms the basic premise from which the approach operates.

*The welfare model assumes that juvenile delinquency is a symptom of deeper maladjustment resulting from an adverse environment. Accordingly, treatment is the intervention of choice, with the welfare of the child the prominent concern. (Rutter and Giller, 1983)*

When action is taken, it is seen to be in the best interests of those receiving it, being as Bean, (1976) suggests sentenced to receive help. Each individual case should be dealt with in the manner seen to most appropriately meet his/her needs and intervention is seen to be beneficial.

*In the case of treatment there is no necessary relation between conduct and treatment; we deal with the person as we do because we think he will be better off as a consequence. (Packer, 1969)*

Specifically in relation to non-attendance, therefore, schools should seek to establish the causes of the behaviour and should provide sympathy and care to deal with this. Punishment is seen to be inappropriate, whereas attempts to discover means of solution would be promoted. Opportunities would thus be provided for the discussion of the difficulties and staff should be fully aware of other bodies with whom they can cooperate to secure the meeting of pupils' needs.

Some also see the provision of offsite units in schools as a related area in which the schools can apply this philosophy to their dealings with non attendance and disruptive behaviour, by providing for the pupils a sanctuary which may compensate for some of the difficulties. This constitutes a recognition that some school factors may actually compound the difficulties of already disadvantaged pupils who are failing to cope with the more academic focus of the schools.

This "liberal" view allows for the recognition that aspects of the school organisation, such as the curriculum and the general school climate, may contribute to pupils' difficulties. Evidence for this effect was provided by Rutter et al (op cit) in their study of twelve London secondary schools to suggest that the general school ethos is an important factor in terms of the degree of academic emphasis, teacher behaviour and the amount of responsibility given to pupils within and outwith the classroom.

The goals of creating an atmosphere with an equal emphasis on learning, acquiring confidence, developing responsibility and forming relationships (the goals of liberal educationalists) are seen to contribute to the reduction in non-attendance and a further means of meeting pupils' needs. Day units may therefore be included in the response to truancy as a means of

giving pupils respite from a "difficult" situation and allowing them to deal with problems prior to returning to mainstream education. In this way, the school experience for the pupil could become part of the overall attempt to deal with his/her underlying problems.

### 3.Educational Reform

As Demarco (op cit) summarises, the views of such critics to truancy differ from the preceding approaches, firstly in their view of the causes of truancy :

*children who keep away from such experiences, or who behave disruptively in relation to them cannot be assumed to be disturbed or delinquent.*

Non-attendance is viewed rather as a positive reaction to the oppressive system, the rejection by a group of pupils of a system which has rejected them. Willis suggests that deviance then becomes one aspect of informal student mobility with resistance to discipline being reactive opposition when a clash occurs between the school and the culture of the pupils. As Demarco (op cit) suggests, truanting pupils :

*rightly resist the blatant displacement of their own perceptions by people and information often seen as irrelevant or even oppressively boring and against which they have no legitimate defence.*

Both traditional and liberal approaches to dealing with non-attendance are therefore criticised, the former seen to constitute the overt legal enforcement of dominant values, the latter a more covert means of social control, by which conformity and acceptable behaviour patterns are encouraged through action presented as being in the pupil's best interests.

Taylor, Walton and Young (op cit) associate this perspective in criminological terms with Radical Deviancy Theory, which criticises the use of punishment to induce behaviour and condemns "social welfare control". It is argued that in both responses, punishment is the practical result, with "therapy", whilst building a helping profession, keeping deviants within the institutional context of reality. (Bean, op cit)

Again, at a macro level, this is related to the broader structure of society and the maintenance of order. At a micro level the means of control is also examined by interactionist theorists to suggest a process common to the above responses, which relies on the "labelling" of deviant pupils to promote these results. The labelling and interpretation of behaviour and the associated judgements made are seen to lead to such cultural explanations of deviance, and Hargreaves, (1972), relating this to schools, identifies four types of pupil :

- 1.The Committed (sharing the values and ideals of the school)
- 2.The Instrumentalists (not so enthusiastic, but seeing school as a vehicle to higher education)
- 3.The Indifferent (bored, but offering no persistent opposition)
- 4.The Opposition (labelled as deviant)

These teacher-definitions are seen to be accepted and reinforced by action taken by the school, which ultimately becomes self-fulfilling.

Thus structural, deschooling and interactionist views of the process of dealing with deviance find expression within the overall view of non-attendance measures as a form of social control. The alternative means of dealing with truancy takes two forms.

The first possible type of response can be related to the assertion by White (op cit) in relation to the difficulty of challenging the institutional provision of education and constitutes an approach seen to be capable of accommodating the widest possible diversity. Grunsell (op cit), having carried out a study of a centre for fifteen teenage truants, suggests that a positive attempt should be made to change the nature of education making it both relevant and appropriate for the pupils. This is based on the recognition that :

*it was easy enough to see why the losers felt that learning was a meaningless game. It was the only method of self defence against the humiliation of being branded as thick.*

Although there are some ambiguities about the role of offsite units, both Grunsell (op cit) and White (op cit) criticise those created by LEAs following the liberal model. Although these are seen to be less formal and more flexible than traditional school approaches, there is still no attempt to provide a genuinely alternative education. They are still seen to constitute :

*an exercise in control, primarily serving the immediate interests of individual schools, a means simply of containing pupils whose behaviour the schools consider intolerable or threatening. (Grunsell, 1980a)*

The perceived emphasis on pupil views would be much greater, with more self direction and the recognition that :

*the teaching profession has no monopoly over truth in education (Grunsell, 1980b)*

and a challenge to what Demarco (op cit) termed :

*certain fundamental assumptions about our education system which, bearing directly on the problems of truancy and indiscipline, are in need of urgent examination. (S.E.D., 1977)*



#### **4.Laissez-Faire**

A second possible response to the types of criticism of schools outlined under the previous response type is to adopt what Bean (1976) has termed a Radical Non-Interventionist approach. This suggests that where possible, those exhibiting the behaviour should be left alone (a form of benign neglect). This is parallel to the deschooling arguments of the Schools as Social Control view expressed in the ideologies, advocating the same type of approach to the organisation of schools, with corresponding structural changes. The criticisms expressed within the previous view will not be restated here, as it is only in terms of overall response to truancy that the major differences occur.

However, the reason for the inclusion of a laissez faire response as a separate action relates to the possibility of this arising in practice for different reasons. This may be described as the course taken whenever no action is instigated by an agency. It need not, therefore, be based in the theoretical criticisms outlined. In fact a laissez faire outcome may instead merely reflect an unwillingness or inability to act.

For the purposes of the typology, therefore, laissez faire will be taken to mean any lack of action on the part of any of the groups of decision-makers. The values and assumptions behind their use of this response will then be subsequently examined.

#### **Summary**

Four broad "types" of possible responses to truancy have thus been isolated, which can be termed the "correctional/law enforcement response" the "welfare response", the "education reform" response and the "laissez - faire response" Each response is based on a set of values and assumptions which

have been outlined. This identifies the possible range of alternative conceptions within the area of non-attendance, and a framework within which to attempt to locate and understand the functions of those involved.

The next chapter will move on to examine the apparent functions of the agencies in relation to these "types" in terms of the legislation and available literature.

## CHAPTER 2

## THE NON-ATTENDANCE PROCESS

Two pieces of legislation govern the process for dealing with pupils who fail to attend school. They will be outlined in detail, in order to provide a preliminary description of the involvement of the agencies with responsibility for dealing with such cases.

The central feature of the education system is the legislative requirement of compulsory education (normally in the form of school attendance) between the ages of five and sixteen. The Education (Scotland) Act 1980, outlines responsibility for this as shared between the parents of the child and the Education Authority. Firstly, Section 1 states :

*it shall be the duty of every education authority to secure that there is made for their area adequate and efficient provision of school education and further education*

and Section 30 :

*it shall be the duty of the parent of every child of school age to provide efficient education for him suitable to his age, ability and aptitude either by causing him to attend a public school regularly or by other means.*

Where parents comply, this is translated into practice in the provision by the Education Authority of sufficient school places and the attendance of the pupils. It is in cases of non-attendance, however, that further sections of the 1980 Act again apply. Under this Act, any failure on the part of a child to attend school regularly without reasonable excuse is considered to be an offence on the part of the parent. Section 35(1) states :

*where a child of school age who has attended a public school*

*on one or more occasions fails without reasonable excuse to attend regularly at the said school, then, unless the Education Authority have consented to the withdrawal of the child from the school (which consent shall not be unreasonably withheld) his parent shall be guilty of an offence against this section.*

This may result in the prosecution of the parent, the process for which will be fully described later.

The second piece of legislation to cover non-attendance is the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968. Section 32(1) states that :

*a child may be in need of compulsory measures of care within the meaning of this part of the Act if any of the conditions mentioned in the next following unnumbered are satisfied with respect to him.*

#### Section 32(2)(f)

*He has failed to attend school regularly without reasonable excuse.*

It is also possible that the child may be referred to the Reporter to the Children's Panel as being outwith parental control or if he has committed an offence whilst truanting. Broadly, therefore, these sections cover the action which may be taken in relation to the parent (under the Education Act) and the pupils (under the Social Work legislation). Beyond these basic legal provisions, the law offers very little to guide the agencies involved, but their areas of involvement in relation to the progression of a non-attendance case can be described in terms of the various options available to them.

## The Process

The process begins with the emergence of non-attendance. The Region operates with the definition of truancy outlined in the Pack Report (op cit), namely :

*an unauthorised absence from school, for any period, as a result of premeditated or spontaneous action on the part of the parent, pupil or both.*

The starting point for the discovery of non-attendance is within the school, the emergence of unauthorised absence depending on its detection within the institution. Schools may have different means of checking attendance in the form of different registration procedures, but following this, there will be within the school a system of referral to the guidance department/head of house or year and varying attempts to deal with non-attendance internally. The length and nature of this process is at the discretion of the individual schools.

The beginning of the formal means for dealing with truancy is by an absence enquiry letter (sent by the school) inviting the parent to comment on the absence. If this fails to elicit a satisfactory response, the Education Welfare Officer will become involved, at the instigation of the school and the request of the Headteacher. This stage may also be accompanied by the child being issued with a daily attendance card to be signed in every class.

The Education Welfare Officer will visit the home and interview the parent, in an attempt to elicit the reasons for absence and facilitate a return to school by the pupil. The E.W.O.'s observations will be noted on an irregular attendance card (Pink Card) issued by the school (differing from the daily attendance card which is an internal school measure). If there is no

improvement, the school may either take no further action, refer the parent to the School Attendance Committee or refer the child to the Reporter to the Children's Panel.

The School Attendance Committee is composed of members of the School Council and an E.W.O. who will act as a representative of the Director of Education. The committee is governed by Section 36(1) of the Education(Scotland) Act 1980 :

*It shall be the duty of the Education Authority if they consider that a parent has committed an offence against section 35 of this Act in respect of a child resident in their area, to serve a notice on the parent requiring him, within such time as may be specified in the notice (not being less than forty eight hours or more than seven days from the service thereof) to appear (with or without the child) before the authority and explain the reason for the absence of the child from school.*

The Attendance Committee meets away from the school premises (the conduct of the meetings and the rules governing their operation are considered in the second half of this chapter) and has several options : to dismiss a case; to continue a case for up to six weeks; to refer the parent to the Procurator Fiscal, to refer the child to the Reporter or to issue an Attendance Order. The Attendance Order is explained in Section 36(2) of the 1980 Act :

*Where an Education Authority in the exercise of the powers conferred upon them in unnumbered (1) above postpone a decision as to whether to prosecute a parent, they may, if the child is still of school age, make an attendance order in respect of the child in accordance with the provisions of Section 38 of this Act requiring the parents to cause the child to attend the public school which he has been attending....*

The order continues while the child is of school age, and if the truancy reemerges, Section 41 states :

*the parent shall if the order is not complied with, be guilty of an offence against this section unless he satisfies the court that he has a reasonable excuse.*

Where a parent is referred for prosecution, the Procurator Fiscal will decide whether or not action should be taken. Education cases are heard in the District court, the penalties specified in Section 43(1) of the 1980 Act :

*Any person guilty of an offence against Section 35, 41 or 42 of this Act shall be liable, on conviction by a court of summary jurisdiction, in the case of a first conviction to a fine not exceeding £50, in the case of a second conviction, whether in respect of the same or another child, to a fine not exceeding £50, and in the case of a third or subsequent conviction, whether in respect of the same or another child, to a fine not exceeding £50 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding one month or to both such fine and such imprisonment.*

Should the school or Attendance Committee choose in addition or instead to refer the child to the Reporter, the Reporter will receive a referral and must decide whether or not to call a Children's hearing.

Section 38(1) of the Social Work (Scotland) Act states:

*Where a Reporter receives information from any source of a case which may require a Children's Hearing to be arranged, he shall, after making such initial investigation as he may think necessary, proceed with the case in accordance with the provisions of the next following section.*

The procedures governing all hearings are detailed in Sections 43 and 44, the panel members (a group of lay persons with whom the decision rests), having the following courses of action available : to discharge the referral, (Section 44, 2) to continue the case (Section 43, (1)(3)), to recommend home supervision of the child by the Social Work Department (Section 44, (1a)) or to recommend compulsory residential supervision (generally in a List D school,

assessment centre or children's home) (Section 44, (1b)).

## **Part 2 – The Apparent Focus of the Agencies**

Having examined the statutory position in relation to school attendance and having thus outlined the areas of involvement of each body, it is useful to examine the available literature concerning their general philosophies.

At this stage this will be restricted to an examination of the ideal type of functioning which relates to each stage. There are many associated criticisms of these ideal types, which will be examined in relation to identified practice. However, at this stage the aim is to provide support for a form of categorisation of the agencies concerned.

### **School Guidance Departments**

From the literature, much of the description of the functions of guidance in schools centres on what Best et al (op cit) identify as "the conventional wisdom", the view that their task is primarily concerned with the resolution of individual problems and support for the pupils. Overall, the guidance function is viewed as a "commitment to care", a "whole child" approach to serve the interests and meet the needs of each child.

Craft, (1969) identifies three components of the guidance task – the educational, vocational and personal which make up the system of pastoral care, and as Marland, (1982) argues, this :

*means looking after the total welfare of the pupil.*

This reflects what Best et al (1983) termed the whole child approach and can be found expressed frequently in descriptions of the role of guidance departments being to :



*provide globality of concern, an all round view of the whole child in his total social setting and not merely a snapshot of the part which shows during arithmetic or P.E..... someone to coordinate the efforts of the teaching staff and of outside welfare specialists in cases of need.*

By this means :

*through its pastoral system, the school becomes potentially a part of the welfare network, by which many agencies provide for the care and control of children of secondary school age.*

It seems, therefore that the predominant view of the function of the school guidance system sees this as a welfare-based organisation. The emphasis is on meeting all the needs of the pupils, on working to solve their problems and focussing on the individual :

*as a person to be valued, respected and loved (Fletcher, 1980)*

This implies a sympathetic approach to the understanding of difficulties.

There is an emphasis on :

*the vulnerable minority - perhaps deprived or disadvantaged in some way ; at risk, perhaps because of the breakdown in their family life ; or unsettled and insecure as a result of family mobility. (Fletcher, 1980)*

and although it is argued that guidance staff have a responsibility to all pupils in their charge, the conventional wisdom suggests that particular help will be given to such pupils in order to overcome injustices, develop relationships and promote "welfare".

As Fletcher (op cit) states, the staff must believe that :

*through commitment to, and care for this particular person, the teacher can help the pupil to find his or her own best self, whatever his present predicament.*

In practical terms, Moore, (1970) identifies two types of guidance system to translate these ideals into practice.

### **The Vertical System**

This means of organisation attempts to create a school within a school, dividing the pupil population into houses which will contain a cross-section of age and ability. The small school will then be subdivided into tutor groups, with the pupils remaining in the same groups throughout their school careers, these forming the basis for the development of relationships and group interest.

### **The Horizontal System**

Under this system pupils are divided into bands, with the age of the pupil used to allocate. This type of organisation, Moore (op cit) argues, is based on the premise that it is reassuring for a pupil to mix with pupils of the same age, allowing children to learn "democratic functioning" and working together.

Through these means of organisation, the wider goals of allowing pupils to develop are seen to be achieved, while the guidance staff provide help with subject choice, career choice and personal difficulties. Guidance structures, in one form or another are now well-established in Scottish schools.

### **School Attendance Committees**

There is little literature relating to the nature, purpose and functioning of these committees, but some indication of their remit and assumptions can be found in the Regional "School Attendance Committees : Notes of Guidance", in the "School Councils : General Guidelines" and in the "School Attendance

Committees Annual Report", produced by the Education Department. The Notes of Guidance describe the remit of the School Attendance Committees as follows :

*it is generally accepted that schools and the community should work together and that it is especially important that schools gain the cooperation and support of the parents in relation to the prevention of truancy. Unfortunately, this does not always happen, and it is in such circumstances that children can present particular difficulties for a school. The need to improve links between schools and the community was recognised in the establishment of school councils and in 1975 the Region decided that part of the new arrangements would be the setting up of attendance committees to undertake for the education committee statutory duties with regard to defaulting parents and to consider applications for exemption from school attendance. As a result attendance committees became an important part of the interface between school and community.*

This description therefore highlights the nature of the committees as being parent-centred bodies. This is further expressed in the functions of the School Attendance Committees, described in the document as follows :

*(a) The overall duty of the committee is to carry out the statutory responsibilities relating to attendance delegated by the Education Committee by the School Council. This will entail :*

*(i) Interviewing parents who are not carrying out the responsibilities assigned to them by the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 in relation to attendance at school*

*(ii) Drawing the attention of the appropriate Procurator Fiscal to the more difficult and intractable cases of non-attendance*

*(iii) Considering applications for exemption from school attendance on the part of their children.*

*(b) The School Attendance Committee is also charged with the general duty of advising the school council on matters relating to attendance.*

It becomes clear, therefore, that in contrast to the guidance departments which are charged with attempting to meet the needs of pupils, the emphasis here is on the attribution of responsibility to the parents and the

enforcement of the law, through the punitive means available to the Procurator Fiscal as stipulated in the Education Act.

There is little written guidance on how the Attendance Committees should perform the task, but it can be inferred from some of the documents available that despite the emphasis on the statutory responsibilities, the decision is not without elements of the welfare method. It is suggested in the Annual Report of 1984 /85 that :

*the task of the School Attendance Committee involves a sensitive appreciation of the complex factors of which non-attendance may be the tangible expression.*

and individual consideration of cases is seen to be necessary :

*the variety of forms which absence from school may take does make it essential however that each case be studied on its merits so that the subsequent action might be the most appropriate in the particular circumstances.*

As seen in Chapter 1 there are several options then available to the members.

Although there is no indication of the nature of the discussion at the meetings, some organisational guidelines are also laid down as follows :

*(a) There should be about eight members of the School Attendance Committee.... Not more than four should attend any one meeting and the quorum is two members....*

*(b) The parent named in the summons should be present....*

*(c) The pupil in question may also be present.....*

*(d) There will also be present.... The Director of Education or his representative..... the Education Welfare Officer for the area and the Headteacher or his representative.*

*(e) The chairman may sanction the attendance ..... of any person..... to support but not replace the parent*

*(f) On certain occasions..... it may be necessary for other persons to be present as observers.*

The guidance for the conduct of the meeting also highlights some of the means of operation :

*14.1 Prior to the parent being invited into the meeting....the chairman should open discussion of the case by considering the details given on....the E.W.O.'s report..... and the school report.....*

*14.2 When the parent has been invited into the meeting....the chairman should then endeavour to ascertain the facts of the case in the view of the parent.*

*14.3 The parent should be asked to withdraw while the committee makes its decision*

*14.4 The decision of the committee is intimated to the parent...*

*(Notes of Guidance)*

It is apparent that the School Attendance Committee, therefore is intended to be primarily a law enforcement body, functioning with the overall aim of ensuring school attendance, and although there may be an element of

*sympathetic understanding of the genuine difficulties of pupils which cause irregular school attendance*

generally they are a means :

*by which the authority can meet its statutory responsibilities to ensure that parents meet their obligation in respect of the education of their children.*

### **The Children's Hearing System**

The system of Children's Hearings emerged in Scotland in 1971, replacing juvenile courts with children's panels and based on the report of the Kilbrandon Committee (HMSO 1964) which had been set up

*to consider the provisions of the law of Scotland relating to the treatment of juvenile delinquents and juveniles in need of care and*

*protection or beyond parental control.*

The suggestion of the committee was that :

*all juveniles under 16 should in principle be removed from the jurisdiction of the criminal courts ; instead juvenile panels should have powers.....to order special measures of education and training according to the needs of the juvenile concerned.*

The recommendation was based on the assumption that both deprived and delinquent children demonstrated similar needs which could be dealt with in the same way. The problem of making legal and welfare considerations was cited as an important obstacle in the court system and the new structure was to separate these functions, leaving a wholly welfare-oriented system of hearings to consider the most appropriate disposal. This was to herald a departure from the more traditional approaches, providing a system to relate primarily to decisions taken in the best interests of the child, (Social Work (Scotland) Act, 1968 Section 43 (1)) the emphasis being on the social, economic and physical disadvantage (as identified in Chapter 1) causing the behaviour and rendering punishment an inappropriate response. Where necessary the purpose of the intervention was seen to be to alleviate the causal factors rather than to relate the disposal directly to the offence:

*truancy was said to arise from maladjustment whether due to personal or environmental factors... The root of the problem in all children was felt to be a failure to develop normally... and key notions in the (Kilbrandon) report's recommendations were assessment, diagnosis and treatment (Morris and McIsaac, 1978)*

Following from this theoretical allegiance to the welfare approach, after the commission of an offence, a diagnostic agency becomes concerned to discover and assess the needs of the individual, before recommending the

most appropriate form of treatment. The treatment should relate to the personal circumstances of the recipient and should allow for early intervention and alteration as circumstances change.

### **The Operation of the System**

Structurally, the Children's Hearing System is operated locally, a pool of lay panel members being appointed by each authority, from which three will be drawn for each particular hearing. These are lay members. The Reporter to the Children's Panel, an independent official, may receive a referral from any source and will proceed to collect and consider any relevant information.

*The key figure in the new system was to be the Reporter... indeed anyone including the child's parents could refer the child to the Reporter and it was then his function to decide, on the basis of reports, whether or not the child referred to him seemed to be in need of special measures of education. If he believed this was so, the child would be referred to the Panel. (Morris and McIsaac, 1978)*

Should the Reporter decide to refer a case to a hearing, several operational guidelines are laid down. The Reporter must organise the hearing and give the child and parents seven days notification of this, as well as a copy of the grounds of referral. The panel members should also be notified at least three days in advance and supplied with the relevant reports.

During the hearing the stress is on informality, although there are certain procedural safeguards operated (particularly Sections 42, 45, 46, 50 and 58 of the 1968 Act). There is no provision in the legislation for the adjustment of the grounds of referral, and the child must fully understand and accept these. If this is the case, an informal discussion will ensue, the case being examined in full, with opportunity given to the child and parents to communicate. At the conclusion of the hearing, the panel members have a

statutory duty to inform the child of their decision, the reasons for it and the child's right of appeal.

The Children's Hearing System, therefore, is firmly located in a commitment to the welfare approach identified in Chapter 1. Asquith, (1983) summarises the assumptions of the 1968 Act as to:

*appeal to a common set of principles. Amongst these are a greater commitment to non-punishment forms of delinquency control; the need for proceedings appropriate to the age of the children involved; the blurring of the distinction between the child who offends and the child who is in need for other reasons; the promotion of preventive measures and the need to keep children out of court as far as possible.*

Cases are, theoretically, referred and organised around the preceding philosophical concerns outlined. The separation of legal and welfare functions clearly highlights this apparent concern with the need to provide a solution to the presenting problem of the child.

### **The Procurator Fiscal**

There is little available evidence of studies relating to the orientation of the Procurator Fiscal, and none in relation to the task concerning non-attendance. However, the most significant recent study, by Moody and Tombs, (op cit), provides some insight into the general orientation and the legislation clearly locates the task in the law enforcement response.

In relation to the responsibility afforded to the Procurator Fiscal to decide whether or not to prosecute a case, Moody and Tombs state :

*the Procurator Fiscal would appear to be in the unique position of enjoying a wide measure of autonomy in making decisions regarding prosecution, without the restrictions imposed by a criminal code, as in Germany, or the need to satisfy an electorate, as in the United States. There is, according to the textbooks, no principle of legality which demands prosecution, nor pressure from the police or other reporting agencies to institute proceedings.*



The Procurator Fiscal alone will decide, therefore, whether or not to prosecute. Renton and Brown, (1972) lay down the following considerations to which attention ought to be paid by all prosecutors in making the decision.

*(1) Whether the factors disclosed in the information constitute either a crime according to the common law of Scotland, or a contravention of an Act of Parliament which extends to that country.*

*(2) Whether there is sufficient evidence in support of these factors to justify the institution of criminal proceedings*

*(3) Whether the act or omission charged is of sufficient importance to be made the subject of a criminal prosecution*

*(4) Whether there is any reason to suspect that the information is inspired by malice or ill will on the part of the informant towards the person charged*

*(5) Whether there is sufficient excuse for the conduct of the accused person to warrant the abandonment of proceedings against him*

*(6) Whether the case is more suitable for trial in the civil court, in respect that the facts raise a question of civil right.*

In terms of the main considerations made by the Procurators Fiscal, Moody and Tombs discovered :

*in spite of the apparent latitude which prosecutors in Scotland have in deciding whether to prosecute, fiscals themselves stress that their discretion is in fact circumscribed : 'the fiscal's instruction is that unless you have special reasons for not doing so'..... [prosecution follows]*

The idea that the function of the prosecutor is to prosecute is fundamental to the Fiscal's definition of his task, as Moody and Tombs state :

*in most cases not to prosecute would be out of the question*

It is also argued that this relates closely to the Fiscals' perceptions of their role as upholders of the law. Moody and Tombs argue that most hold a clear law enforcement view, accepting that the legislation should be the central consideration and their task to serve the public interest through deterrence,

punishment and retribution. However, it is suggested that a further purpose of bringing cases to prosecution may also provide in the end the input of help necessary to assist individuals concerned.

However, the overall picture is one of a predominantly overtly control-oriented body, responding to the legal provision and referring for punishment those who do not conform to the precepts of common or statute law. The emphasis on responsibility, consideration of legal facts and penalties provides a contrast to the stated function and purpose of the Reporter's Department.

### **Overview**

From the preceding discussion, the available information suggests that two "types" of agency are involved in the decision making process in relation to truanting pupils. The School Attendance Committees and Procurator Fiscal's office, both of which are concerned to deal with the parents under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 are predominantly law enforcement agencies, concerned to level at "defaulting" parents the appropriate legal sanctions to secure a return of the pupil to the school.

The two agencies involved in dealing with the pupils, however, the guidance departments and the children's hearing system are presented as having the task of "meeting the needs" of the pupils by adopting an individualised welfare approach. The remits of the agencies thus imply that pupils will be dealt with through this sympathetic, welfare-based approach, while their parents are dealt with through legal channels. At this stage it is interesting to note that within the same overall task of dealing with non-attendance, there is this scope for the operation of these two competing views of the causes of, and responses to, deviant behaviour. The identification

of these orientations is at present sufficient to set in context the examination of the translation of these goals into practice.

## CHAPTER 3

## METHOD

**The Aims of the Study**

In order to determine the most appropriate methods to be used to approach the examination of the functions of the agencies, the aims of the study were considered. It was clear from the outset that in order to provide an outline of the agencies' involvement in non-attendance, the relevant qualitative methods of enquiry should be applied to provide a descriptive/analytical account of their practices. Three questions appeared to be centrally important in the examination: -

(a) How do individuals/agencies respond to truanting pupils in their face to face contacts with them? This would involve considering the actions taken, the nature of the interaction between the parties and the situational factors which may be seen to bear on the exchanges.

(b) How do individuals/agencies view truancy and their role in relation to this? This would involve eliciting the participants' views of the nature and causes of non-attendance, their perceived "solutions" and their explanations of any action taken.

(c) What factual information is available to the decision makers and what written evidence can be found to support the observed/described responses of those concerned.

It was felt that the examination of any one aspect of the above questions in isolation would limit the validity of the final account, and only by providing evidence in each of these three categories could a full picture of

how each of the groups involved dealt with the "management of truancy" be provided.

## THE METHOD

The identification of the three central issues appeared to suggest the use of a combination of qualitative techniques, applying to each aspect of the study the method seen to be of most value in gathering the information sought. The use of a variety of techniques within a piece of research has been described by Burgess (Burgess, 1984) as "multiple strategies", whereby;

*in short, the field researcher is concerned with operations that yield profound meaningful and valid data. (Burgess, 1982)*

This encompasses Stacey's suggestion of combined operations (Stacey, 1969), Denzin's "triangulation" (Denzin, 1970) and Douglas' "mixed strategies" (Douglas, 1976) pointing to the common theme of

*the use of diverse methods to tackle a research problem. (Burgess, op cit)*

The benefits of the adoption of such methods overcome the problem of a rigid focus in the research. The resultant data produced stems from a variety of different procedures on the area of investigation. As Burgess (op cit) goes on to state

*it is only when observational and interview data are integrated that the full potential of multiple field methods can be realised.*

by providing

*flexibility, cross validation of data and theoretical relevance.*

The study therefore combined three techniques - the use of observation, the use of interviewing and the use of records, in order to, as Trow (1957) suggested

*get on with the business of attacking our problems with the widest array of conceptual and methodological tools that we possess and they demand. This does not preclude discussion and debate regarding the relative usefulness of methods for the study of specific problems or types of problems. But that is very different from the assertion of the general and inherent superiority of one method over another on the basis of some intrinsic qualities it presumably possesses.*

The three methods used and the reasons for the choice of this combination will now be outlined.

### 1. The Use of Observation

Many of the justifications for the use of techniques of observation are to be found in general sociological arguments relating to the need to understand the area of investigation in terms of its meaning for the actors, only possible, as Becker states, by:

*participating in the daily life of the group or organisation he studies. He watches the people he is studying to see what situations they ordinarily meet and how they behave in them. He enters into conversation with some or all of the participants in these situations and discovers their interpretations of the events he has observed. (Becker, 1958)*

The most obvious benefit of the use of observation in this study relates to the need for collection of data in the situations as they occur, rather than relying solely on the respondents' accounts of their actions. This relates to issue (a), described in relation to the aims of the study. Through observation, the response, for example, of a guidance teacher to a pupil could

then be compared to, or used in conjunction with their verbal account of their action in such a situation. The situation could readily be envisaged whereby a member of an organisation stated at interview that the considerations were those of a welfare approach, when in fact the methods observed accorded more closely to the identified features of a Correctional/Law Enforcement response (see Chapter 1). A further example is provided by the situation in relation to School Attendance Committees and Children's Hearings, where the interaction (in theory at least) forms a critical component in the final decision and where it would be impossible to gain a picture of the process within the central arena without being present.

The method of observation used was to make clear, to all groups studied, the observational role adopted, the aim to record data whilst causing minimal disruption. This open observation was clearly the only viable option in the agencies studied as there were no "covert" roles for which the researcher was qualified to adopt. The benefits of the situation were the ability to ask questions in response to events as they arose, and the capacity to remain somewhat more "neutral" within the organisation.

Overall, the data collection took the form of what Spradley (1980) termed "descriptive observation", the basic aim being to record the setting, activities and events taking place over a period. Attempting to isolate a "response" to truancy lent itself to such an approach, as both the behaviour of the staff and the related action taken could be seen together. Information from this source would be complemented by focussed questions of the second technique.



## 2. The Use of Interviews

It was felt that any attempt to assess the response of the agencies based on the use of observation alone would be as inadequate as relying solely on their reported actions, as clearly crucial to the understanding of the overall approach observed is the actor's perception of his response. In addition it was felt that a broader overall perspective could be gained by allowing the participants to report their views in relation to non-attendance [Aim(b)] and the subjectively perceived reasons and justifications for the actions taken could then be discovered. As Burgess (op cit) states

*conversation is a crucial element of field research,*

and Palmer (1928) points out :

*the ability of the objects of social research to converse with each other and with the scientific investigator is so vital a characteristic of the subject matter of the social sciences that it cannot be discarded in any well-rounded study.*

There is a great deal of debate about the form which an interview should take, ranging from tightly structured to completely unstructured. A combination of the recognised benefits of both (the ability to define the area to be covered and to ask the same questions of all parties, as well as the ability to follow up unclear issues and give the respondent the opportunity to describe his/her views in detail without forcing the responses into predefined categories) was chosen in the form of the use of the semi-structured interview schedule. (Appendix 1)

As the examination centred on the actor's views in relation to



truancy, a number of topics were included in the interviews to elicit some of the beliefs and assumptions which would contribute to the understanding of their actions. Although the different types of disposals available to each group of respondents varied, necessitating a separate interview schedule for each agency the areas covered were designed to be comparable as follows :

Section A - related to the provision of general background information, to provide an easily accessible record of the respondent's involvement (e.g. guidance teacher/attendance committee member etc) and to give the respondent the opportunity to discuss straightforward issues before moving on to elicit more personal beliefs and values. This section also allowed for a discussion of the respondents' perception of their roles in the process and to locate this in terms of the overall system.

Section B - related to the attitude to schools. This are provided valuable information in terms of the distinction made in Chapter 1 between views of the nature and purpose of schooling and the aspects of "education" felt to be important.

Sections C & D - similarly related to an exploration of the respondent's "assumptive world" in the context of truancy.

Section E - related also to the exploration of these beliefs and values, moving to a consideration of the actual responses and intended to produce an outline of the individual's view of the most appropriate action. This too, was intended to indicate the "type" of approach to deviance, in particular to non-attendance. It was felt that this would be reflected in their views of when, and for what purpose agencies other than their own should be involved.

Section F - constituted a brief examination of the justifications given

for the exercise of discretion.

Section G – again related in part to the explanation of the background beliefs of the respondent and an overview of the non-attendance process.

From these questions, it was felt that examples of concerns relating to the various "types" of response in Chapter 1 could be identified, relating directly to aspects of beliefs and values isolated as possible influences. As stated, this would supplement the data gathered in observation.

### **3. The Use of Records**

The use of records (where available) was the third main source of information (relating to aim (a)). In each of the agencies, any documentary recording of non-attendance was examined and noted. The documents selected were what Burgess (op cit) termed "primary sources" (relating directly to the people, situations and events studied), generally "private" (personal reports) and "unsolicited" (produced without research in mind, but for a particular purpose). These reports were generally designed to provide information from one agency to another (e.g. Pink Cards from school to EWO, School Reports to School Attendance Committees and Hearings, and Social Work Reports to Hearings). Although forming only a small proportion of the data collected, some contained recommendations and concerns of the author, again indicative of a particular perspective.

### **THE RESEARCH PROCESS**

Having identified the techniques to be used in order to provide a full picture of the involvement of agencies, the specific practical operation must

be described. To provide the desired data, (the means of responding to truancy) it became clear that each of the agencies involved at various stages be included thus making it easy to "select locations, time periods, events and people for study" (Burgess, op cit). This involved the schools, their Attendance Committees, the Children's Hearing system and the Reporter to the Children's Panel.

It was decided to focus on a group of schools and their guidance departments (as much of the dealing with non-attendance for the pupils takes place at this stage) to provide a means of comparison between different establishments, then to follow the process through those agencies subsequently involved. It was decided to study the overall focus of each of the agencies rather than following a particular group of truancy cases through the system, the main reason for this being that by choosing a group of non-attendance cases it was likely that the opportunity to examine other agencies' involvement would depend on whether or not the chosen cases reached those stages. In fact this would have lead to the possibility of having no contact with the Procurator Fiscal (for example). It would also have provided only a limited view of the lesser used agencies' involvement. Instead, for the purposes of gaining an overall view of agencies perspectives, it seemed the best method was to observe and examine dealings of each with all aspects of non-attendance during a specific period.

### **Gaining Access**

This was to be a pre-requisite for the research to be conducted, and, as Burgess (op cit) suggests:

*at its most basic, access involves gaining permission to do a piece of research in a particular social setting or institution.*

Formal permission was sought from the Regional Council Department of Education to approach individual schools and this was done by individual letters to the headteachers of those selected. Following this, a series of informal visits was carried out to schools, as a means of introduction and to give the staff a notion of the nature and purpose of the subsequent action.

Access to the school attendance committees was sought from within the schools, but also necessitated an approach to the Education Welfare Service. A series of visits were made to the Chief EWO, who approved observation at these. However, in practice, the EWOs were in dispute over regrading, a consequence of which was to refuse to cooperate formally. However, following discussions over a period with each of the EWOs in the schools visited, the individual EWOs concerned were prepared to allow such observation in their respective committees.

The Department of the Reporter to the Children's Panel was approached formally by letter, then a visit to the Regional Reporter was made, to fully explain the proposed method and the nature of the research. Following this, discussion with the Divisional Reporter to arrange attendance at hearings and contact with the panel members was conducted. Panel members themselves were contacted by letter, then subsequently telephoned to arrange the interviews.

Similarly, the Procurator Fiscal's Office was first approached by letter, then subsequently a preparatory visit was made to the Senior Summary Depute, again to describe the nature of the research envisaged. Agreement and cooperation here, too, was gained.

Thus following this fairly detailed process of negotiation, the research

was carried out between November 1983 and the end of the school year in June 1984, as follows.

### **The Schools**

Four schools within the Region, which contained a range of sizes of school, types of catchment area and central follow-up agencies were selected for study. The reasons for the particular choice of schools relate to an attempt to provide a variety of settings and catchment areas. The starting point for the selection of schools was discussion with the Chief EWO for the Region who isolated Oakbank High School as having a particularly severe non-attendance problem. This school was located in a deprived catchment area (see Chapter 4) and it was decided to include another school in a similarly deprived catchment area which did not have the same scale of problem (Ashdale). It then seemed to be useful to examine two other schools in a different type of area, and Birchwood and Bayview were selected as having mixed but predominantly middle class catchment areas at opposite ends of the city. It was thus hoped to provide a balance of middle class and working class schools, and provide a useful basis for comparison.

A period of three weeks' observation was carried out in each of the schools, within their guidance departments. The nature of this was in part determined by the specific organisation of the school, but took place as follows.

### **Oakbank**

In this school there were three separate "houserooms" which were manned when members of the guidance staff were on duty. Thus the periods of observation were spent in whichever of these had guidance staff members

operating at a specific time, moving between rooms as this changed. At times when all guidance staff were operating (e.g. morning registration) the rooms chosen were rotated to provide comparable spells in each. On occasions when no guidance staff were available, records were examined, in the form of Pink Cards, reports to Attendance Committees and reports to Children's Hearings. These were kept centrally making access simple and a large number available.

At the time of the research, one member of the guidance team was unwell, but all the others (5) were interviewed. This generally took place during the free periods and was arranged over the course of the three weeks. The Headteacher was also interviewed, as he expressed a particular interest in the area.

#### **Ashdale**

Here, too, the school was divided into areas, in this case pertaining to year groups which contained within them the guidance departments, and the method used was the same as that at Oakbank, spending time with the staff available and attempting to spend a comparable period of time in each year group. A substantial amount of time was also spent in the main staffroom, as the school policy was for all staff to spend morning and lunch breaks there.

As in Oakbank, records were kept centrally and these were examined during spare time. The interviews were carried out over the period, with the six guidance staff in the school, and also with the assistant headteacher with responsibility for guidance, who participated in dealing with pupils who failed to attend.

### **Birchwood**

The entire period of observation in this school took place in the guidance room. Birchwood has one room in the basement of a teaching block which is allocated to guidance. Although on occasion there would be no staff present, it was possible to spend the entire three week period here, as this was where all the guidance activity took place. There were 11 guidance staff in the school, and 10 of these were interviewed. (The other was seldom in the guidance room and "unavailable" for interview.) Access to records in this school was more difficult, as the Pink Cards, reports to Attendance Committees and reports to hearings were contained within the pupils' files). This necessitated working through the vast number of pupil files for each year in an attempt to find these, only a small number being discovered, however, those available were examined.

### **Bayview**

The guidance department here was divided into year groupings, with a male and female member of guidance staff for each year. The situation in relation to observation was somewhat more difficult in this school, as guidance staff could rarely be found in their guidance rooms unless they had a specific task there. For this reason guidance staff were first contacted to arrange interviews and this was carried out in the guidance areas to combine observation and interview there.

There were few dealings with truanting pupils and few informal attendance - related contacts to observe, thus guidance staff were sought whenever possible, with longer periods in the central staffroom. However, over the three week period, some time was spent with each guidance teacher and the year areas were visited during specific periods such as morning

registration. The examination of records also provided a convenient means of spending time in guidance rooms (as these were kept in pupils' files, but again few of these could be found. These factors, and the means of organisation encountered and observed in themselves provided a useful source of data.

### **The School Attendance Committees**

The School Attendance Committees for each of the four schools visited were examined. The four were chosen in part because this would provide a useful comparison with the particular schools, and partly because given the EWOs' dispute it seemed more likely that officers with whom informal contacts had been made and relationships developed would allow access to these.

The records available to committees had been examined within the schools, so this section of the research concentrated on the observation of the committee meetings themselves and the interviewing of the committee members. These meetings took place in the evenings, and a total of 47 cases were observed as follows :

Oakbank	- 14
Ashdale	- 12
Birchwood	- 9
Bayview	- 12

Each case lasted approximately 30 minutes, although this varied, with continued cases being somewhat shorter. The presence of the researcher was explained to the family by the Chairperson in every case, and the parents and pupils assured that the examination was of the general methods of dealing with non-attendance rather than their particular cases. Detailed notes could not be taken at the meetings, but some conversations were recorded and



general reminders of the progress of each case noted. Between cases, and immediately following the meetings, detailed notes were made of each case.

The selection of committee members for interview became a simple process, as the members involved were the same individuals each time ( a function of the difficulty faced by schools in gaining attendance committee members). These members were approached by letter (and prior to meetings) and interviews arranged, which took place in their own homes and lasted approximately one hour (although this varied from 45 minutes to two hours). A total of 12 committee members were interviewed.

### **The Reporter's Department**

This section of the research had two components – the contact and interviewing of the Reporters themselves, and the attendance at hearings/interviewing of panel members.

Firstly, with the Reporters, one Division (West) was selected (in fact by the Regional Reporter, as the Divisional Reporter concerned had expressed a willingness to be involved), and a month spent here. The period was spent with the Divisional Reporter concerned, in his office for a large part of the time. However, as will be seen in Chapter 9, non-attendance forms only a small proportion of the Reporter's task, and much of the time the Reporter was involved in dealing with other referrals. This time was used to examine records (which were extremely detailed) whilst remaining present in the Reporter's office. Any specific dealings with schools/truancy cases were brought to the researcher's attention by the Reporter. Much informal discussion also took place during this period.

The means of selection of records was to examine the referrals for

non-attendance for the previous year (1983), isolating these from a central record, then finding the relevant file. Within these were contained all the reports and the disposals of the panels, as well as the Reporter's decision.

In terms of interviews, the situation differed from the previous agencies, as the observation centred only on the Reporter concerned. However, this accurately reflects the relative involvement in dealing with non-attendance. This Reporter was interviewed, and in addition, the Regional and Depute Regional Reporters were interviewed in an attempt to get a wider view of the department's approach.

Throughout the period of observation, any hearings which were based on non-attendance referrals were attended, and even after the departure of the researcher, the Reporter would notify of any impending relevant hearings. A total of 13 hearings were observed, lasting generally 45 minutes, although some were shorter, some considerably longer.

The selection of panel members for interview was less straightforward than that of the attendance committees, as those present differed between hearings (although all were drawn from the West panel) and there was no consistent group observed. Thus it was decided to contact all those involved in this division, to request permission to conduct the interviews. All agreed to be interviewed, and from this group, 10 were selected at random (providing a number comparable to that of attendance committee members – a number large enough to provide a spectrum of views, yet small enough to be feasible within the time constraints). These panel members were interviewed in their own homes, again taking 45 minutes to one hour.

## **The Procurators Fiscal**

The observation in the Procurator Fiscal's office, compared to the other areas, was less straightforward. Where non-attendance forms a small proportion of the Reporter's work, for the Procurator Fiscal this is even less. The decision making process relates to the function of marking cases, but the normal course of action was for the cases to be marked along with all the others coming to the office. A period of observation such as that carried out with the other agencies carried the danger of including none or very few non-attendance cases.

Thus in discussion with the Senior Summary Depute, the following was agreed. Several spells were spent with the summary team in the room where cases were marked in informal discussion and general observation. In addition, over the period of research, non-attendance referrals were withdrawn from the caseload and kept separately. At prearranged time, periods of observation were spent watching these particular cases being marked, having the reasons for the decisions taken explained in the process.

The same applied to court cases, with the Procurator Fiscal notifying the researcher when a case was due to be heard. Six court cases were observed in the District court, the researcher sitting in the public gallery on the days on which these arose, noting the proceedings as they occurred.

The examination of records was done in conjunction with the observation of marking, as again it would have been difficult to find details of previous cases. Thus, the information provided with the cases examined provided the documentary evidence. In addition, interviews were carried out with the Senior Summary Depute and three members (half of the Summary

Team), selected by availability (many would be in court on the days on which the office was visited).

### **Recording the Data**

The exact form of recording the data varied from agency to agency, but where possible, notes were taken during observation. This was a relatively simple task in the schools, as there were many periods during which guidance staff were unavailable or engaged in other tasks. Although, as stated earlier, it was impossible to take detailed notes during attendance committee meetings, these were written immediately after the interaction (as these took place during the evenings). It was a condition of access to the Reporter's Department that the recording of hearings data should not be done during the discussions. Like the Attendance Committees, full accounts were written, generally in the Reporter's office, following the hearings. During observation of court hearings, detailed notes could be taken from the public gallery.

All the interviews except one were tape recorded (one guidance teacher at Bayview refused). The reason for the use of the recorder was to allow full attention to be paid to the answers given by the respondents and to provide a complete account of the conversations. All the interviews were subsequently fully transcribed verbatim.

The collection of records has been discussed in relation to the agencies themselves, and provided a less comprehensive body of data. In the case of two of the schools, as stated, the availability was limited by their organisation, although in the other schools there was a substantial number examined. In the Reporter's Department and Procurator Fiscal's office, however, such reports provided a rich source of information and were fully copied. Decisions made and reasons given were copied and the form of

organisation of the information noted.

### **The Data Analysis**

From all the sources, therefore, a vast amount of qualitative data was collected. The periods of time spent and numbers interviewed in each agency is to an extent a reflection of (a) the involvement of specific individuals in the decision making and (b) the involvement of the agency in the overall process. As the schools dealt with truanting pupils over a longer period of time and with a greater number of decisions to be made, for a greater number of pupils, these will form the first half of the data presentation. With the agencies outwith the schools having a lesser, although for the individual pupils dealt with, important involvement, the results from these will form the second half of the presentation.

The purpose of the analysis was to utilise the evidence collected in an attempt to provide a description of the approaches and concerns in each particular group relating to non-attendance.

With the focus (Chapter 1) on the responses to occurrences of the behaviour, the attempt to identify types of action taken and the predominant focus of each agency, the most appropriate starting point for analysis was the decisions themselves. Thus the central decisions for each group were identified.

For the schools it was clear that there were several stages, covering a substantial time period, where decisions had to be made. These related to the action taken immediately following detection of truancy, the use of internal school measures, referral to the EWO and the use of the irregular attendance card (Pink Card). Thus, instances of observation of these decisions , the

behaviour identified and the justifications given were sought. This, alongside the descriptive data relating to the setting and organisation provided one aspect of the identification of a response. The interviews were examined around the actual decision making process and comments thereon, as well as involving identification in each school of the main concerns expressed in relation to the overall non-attendance process. Finally, comments from the records were used to provide further details for the reasons for the use of the chosen measures. This method was to form the basis for analysis in all the agencies.

In the School Attendance Committees, Children's Hearings and the courts, the instances of the behaviour to be observed were clear – the meetings, the conduct of the interaction, any identifiable patterns of operation and the final actions taken could all be documented. The decisions to be observed (the six options open to Attendance Committees detailed in Chapter 8) were directly related to the preceding events. Again, in each case, interview and record data were used in the way described , to augment the overall picture which emerged and the emphases of the participants.

In the case of the Reporters, the observable instances of dealing with truanting pupils were fewer, and family contact minimal. There was little, therefore, in relation to the Reporter's decision of whether or not to call a hearing, to observe, beyond these few occasions (the main body of children's hearing observation confined to the hearings themselves), and more emphasis had to be placed on the Reporters' accounts. However, there were some "observable" decisions, and the records also provided a valuable data source. In addition, the observational period provided a general overview of the Reporter's orientation.

With the Procurator Fiscal, the central decision related to whether or not to refer the case for prosecution, and this, too, was examined in terms of the nature of the cases examined, the decisions observed and the reasons given at interview. The court decisions observed provided a source of the consequent decision in relation to disposal.

The aim of the analysis was by these means to produce a descriptive account of the means adopted by each agency and a related analytical account of their orientation in relation to the response types outlined. In the presentation, reference will be made to all three data sources at various stages, working through the focus of the agencies and their actions and concerns in each aspect of their decision-making, drawing all the findings together in an overall picture of their functioning, following the prescription of

C. Wright Mills :

*avoid any rigid set of procedures.....above all seek to develop and use the sociological imagination....avoid the fetishism of method and technique....let every man be his own methodologist....let every man be his own theorist; let theory and method again become the practice of a craft.*

**CHAPTER 4****OAKBANK**

In each of the following chapters, the characteristics of each school will be presented and the responses isolated.

In Oakbank, the emphasis in relation to dealing with truancy was on a staff commitment to a welfare approach which was to form the basis of their actions. This was not, however, the entire picture, as will become clear from the evidence presented, and a complex system of responses emerged, reflecting the specific philosophical views of the staff and the constraints operating in the school and surrounding environment. Although this caring approach was the principle on which the staff felt they operated, the response was often punitive, sometimes laissez-faire. There was in practice a division of pupils into types, and on the basis of these categories, the differing responses would be justified. This was to raise several questions about the means of dealing with truancy in the school.

**POLICY AND PURPOSES**

The commitment to a welfare approach and the overall ethos of the school became apparent firstly in relation to school policy.

**The School**

Oakbank High School is situated in the south east of the city, with a roll of 597, covering all stages of secondary education. The catchment area of the school covers a large, run down housing scheme on the edge of the city, although the school building is new and well-decorated.

The catchment area was described by all the staff as multiply



deprived, containing :

*any social problem you can think of....one parent families, drink problems, drug problems, kids living with grannies, divorce, violence, large families, unemployment*

making the surrounding district :

*one of the poorest areas in the city.....we're working at the very bottom of the socio-economic scale.*

When the guidance staff were interviewed, the main stress was on the social development of the pupils, with examination qualifications, although recognised as important for some pupils, not the sole concern. As one put it :

*education's got to be more than how many CSE's or O Grades you can get.*

All 6 staff also described their role in terms of the conventional wisdom of guidance, and all felt their main function was to ensure that each individual child was well looked after, dealing with any problems that might arise. A typical description was as follows :

*to have a caring oversight for the youngsters in our house and to try and advise them on the right road to take individually,*

and another :

*I tend to deal with the kids' personal problems more because I'm more motivated towards pastoral care than education.*

The emphasis in their descriptions, in all cases tended towards this personal aspect of the guidance function, concentrating on their tasks in relation to personal counselling as much, if not more, than the vocational and curricular advice. The degree of agreement amongst the staff came across

strongly, and it was clear that the staff presented the same concern with the provision of an all-round individually specific education and the "meeting of needs" of the pupils in all areas.

This view of the focus of the school was also apparent in the school brochure, which emphasised two aspects of Oakbank to parents. Firstly, there was the belief that the school and community must participate to ensure the best possible "education" for those involved. This included mention of the school's increasing breadth of courses available, as well as the provision of some courses for adults. Secondly, the social function of the school was stressed :

*formal education is only one part of the story. Oakbank is concerned with the growth in personality and character of all its students.*

Both staff and brochure descriptions, therefore, described a school with a broad educative function and a good selection of courses, against a background of concern for the individual pupils in their charge.

The educational aims of the school were presented as follows :

*the educational aims of Oakbank are to create by every possible means an atmosphere where easy and constructive change for youngsters and adults alike can take place - an atmosphere guaranteed to measure up to the needs of every student, and one which, apart from ensuring that every student reaches his or her fullest potential, builds confidence and self-esteem.*

This emphasis reflects the same basic stated concerns of easy access to the school and the broad development of all those who attend, as well as the focus on the needs of individual pupils.

## The Guidance Structure

Oakbank operated a vertical guidance structure, with each house containing approximately equal numbers of pupils from each year. The school divided into three houses, each having two guidance teachers. General teaching staff were also allocated to a house to form part of that team, the emphasis being on staff working together within a cohesive system. Allocation of pupils to houses was primarily by family, and thereafter on the basis of attempting to achieve an even spread of pupils in terms of abilities and difficulties, and the purpose of the system presented as follows :

*for several years, Oakbank has had a team of teachers who are given responsibility for the welfare of the pupils*

and the overall purpose that :

*the guidance system aids the development of the student both in social education and in counselling.*

This type of counselling is encouraged :

*we would hope that your son/daughter would feel free to take any problem to his/her guidance teacher where it could be discussed secure in the knowledge that any information entrusted to the guidance teacher will be confidential.*

The caring, problem-solving approach extends to the parents :

*we would hope that gradually you would learn to know and to trust the guidance teacher and to contact him/her if anything is causing you concern,*

implying a commitment to the functions of this department as a central feature of the school.

The school, therefore, apparently functioned with the general aim of securing the overall welfare of all those with access to its facilities, pupils and

parents alike, presenting an almost paternalistic concern with the entire community. The overall ethos was one of development and accessibility, with staff, pupils and parents cooperating to make the school an appealing place.

### **Non-Attendance Options**

Registration in Oakbank was carried out by the Group Tutor (a class teacher with responsibility for a group of pupils), through a newly installed computer system. Each pupil and teacher had a number, and at registration, those late or absent would be noted. Throughout the day every teacher would mark on the computer card the code number of each pupil absent, and a subsequent printout supplied the names of missing pupils.

After three days' unexplained absence, the Group Tutor should send out an absence enquiry before referral to the guidance staff. Internal measures, such as discussion, irregular attendance sheet and individual changes may be attempted. The Pink Card and EWO system followed, then progress to the external agencies of Reporter and Procurator Fiscal if there was to be further action.

These options were presented in terms of the problem - solving function, and concern with pupils' welfare :

*in school we do not forget that the pupils we teach are your children. They cannot benefit fully from the education offered in school unless they attend regularly.*

Parental cooperation in relation to this was sought :

*if you suspect truancy, please inform the school at once so that the guidance staff can help you to find the reason and prevent a recurrence of the problem.*

From observation, interview and indeed from the school's presentation in the

brochure, therefore, the commitment was clear – the concern in relation to truancy would be the examination and solution of the pupils' problems and the attempt to meet their needs, in accordance with a welfare orientation.

## PRACTICE

As suggested at the outset, practical dealings with truancy involved a variety of concerns, influences and responses. The outcome was dependent on the perception of the type of family, and the means of distinguishing these will be outlined, as this is central to an understanding of the actions of the staff in this school.

### The Detection Process

The first stage in the process of dealing with truancy, the isolation of the non-attendance, involved the selection of the group of pupils who would be dealt with by the guidance staff.

In practice a combination of means was used in the isolation of truancy, beyond the apparent reliance on the computer system. In fact the computer was largely rejected by the guidance staff, being met with a lack of confidence. At interview, one of the staff mentioned particularly the lack of accuracy of input (with incorrect numbers being marked on the cards) and delays in the receipt of information (attributed to teaching staff forgetting to send in their slips). As one stated :

*the computer attendance unfortunately requires human input and that's inaccurate.*

The role of the group tutor in the detection of truancy was also less than suggested, and 4 of the staff also mentioned variation in the willingness and stringency with which registration was carried out :

*some group tutors are very good and will come out with the registers and go over people but far too many don't.*

The reason given for this was that :

*some of them look upon it as a task they don't want to do.*

This raises important concerns and which will be discussed later.

In general the process of discovery rested with the guidance staff, through a weekly register check for patterns of unexplained absence. The 2 staff in each houseroom set aside time to discuss which cases required action and this was the most usual means of detection.

This suggests on their part a commitment to isolating the truancy themselves and making a definite attempt to deal with it. This is supported by the regularity of the register check and willingness to follow up information. It was apparent during interview and observation that the guidance staff had knowledge of the pupils in their charge, knowing more than the pupil's group tutor :

*we have the knowledge of the kids that other teachers don't have.*

Lastly, guidance teachers would also be willing to follow up information from other pupils :

*you pick up some truancy from kids, from chat. While it's not concrete evidence, it leads you to investigate further.*

This too was observed, with pupils openly discussing friends who were absent during morning contact with guidance staff (for signing of attendance books, queries etc.)

The absence enquiry, too, in practice was a task for the guidance

staff and similar reasons were advanced for this, in terms of the lack of involvement desired by many of the register teachers. The decision to send out such an enquiry was fairly standard with the emergence of a period of three days' unexplained absence. These stages were merely seeking to confirm a suspicion of truancy, but reinforce the involvement of the guidance staff at all stages (although this seems to be a response to a lack of action by others rather than a positive decision).

Where the procedure in Oakbank did diverge from the official regional absence enquiry, however, was the form this took. The guidance staff did not use the regional letter, but had designed their own, asking the parents why the pupil had been absent. The justification given for this was that parents would find the school's own letter easier to understand and would consequently be more likely to cooperate. This less formalised approach at this stage indicated an attempt to put into practice the stated aim of parental involvement, as well as attempting to discover the nature of the causes.

However, the lack of involvement by the group tutors already began to sift out some pupils for whom action would not be taken. In particular, the guidance staff acknowledged that this may apply to more difficult pupils who would not be referred. This lack of action also applied to impending S4 leavers. Some truancy would therefore already be ignored.

### **Internal School Actions**

The next stage also involved the sifting of pupils, and here a deliberate attempt was made to identify types.

For all the guidance staff, the first action following the realisation that a pupil was truanting was to contact the pupil, and if possible bring him/her to

the guidance room. The reason all the guidance staff gave for this action was to furnish themselves, in the first instance, with more information :

*you could just talk to them about it and find out why they've been doing it, when it started.*

This might in fact be the only action that was taken in respect of a pupil's truancy, if the pupil was able to give the impression that the non-attendance had been an isolated incident and there were no difficulties. All the staff acknowledged that there would be some pupils whose truancy was not serious and would require no further action, generally where there appeared to be no problems identified, the truancy had been short term and there had not been a previous persistent problem :

*if I felt confident that it wasn't going to happen again, I would leave it at that if it had only been a short term thing.*

For these pupils, the guidance response resulted in a telling off. In many cases, the attendance sheet was used concurrently to monitor this.

Where a school problem, however, was cited as the cause by the pupil, internal school changes would be attempted. School problems mentioned by the staff as possible contributory factors were personality clashes with teachers, problems with other pupils or difficulties in a particular subject.

It must be noted, however, that many of the staff said that the pupils would always blame the school when questioned, and the guidance teachers therefore would assess the validity of the claim in order to decide whether to treat the case as a discipline problem or to attempt an individual solution. This



would be done partly by examining the nature of truancy and its association with particular subjects, on the basis of knowledge of the pupil and again previous behaviour.

Some pupils were therefore defined as more believable than others – the selection of those who deserved individualised solutions and those who did not. For those who did merit this, the staff might attempt to solve the problem, either by changing a pupil's class or making a timetable alteration, and during observation this internal flexibility was apparent.

At one stage a pupil was allowed to sit in her guidance room for a period working under the supervision of the guidance teacher. A problem with her maths teacher had led to her missing this class, and this informal arrangement had been made to take the heat out of the situation.

In a similar case, a boy in S3 was avoiding science periods because of internal problems. The Guidance Teacher described her action in relation to this case. The boy :

*attends a period, then truants. I've had mum up regularly to try and find out why. He won't talk to anybody in the school. Mum came back and said his brother said he doesn't like science.....he does love art, so I decided to get him out of science and get him to do extra art.*

The use of the attendance card also depended on the type and this would be an immediate response for pupils who had truanted previously (again provided the truancy was for relatively short spells) and many staff also mentioned being aware of which pupils to keep an eye on, based on existing knowledge of other members of the child's family (the criteria for internal changes). The third reason for the use of this measure was following a request from a parent or School Attendance Committee, "just to see how things progress".

Although the use of this measure was in part to monitor a child's progress from the point of view of allowing them to deal with problems, it seemed other concerns may also intrude, the standardisation of its use for likely truants suggesting this as a further means of disciplining those pupils who would have received a telling off. One guidance teacher admitted that :

*it's a bit of a punishment to them. They don't like it.*

On further examination this was even clearer. The system in the school for repeated indiscipline involved a system of reports, with pupils moving through a colour coded range of forms. The group tutor may put the pupil on a white form (working on the same principle as the attendance sheet, monitoring a check on behaviour in each class and signed at home). If behaviour did not improve, the pupil moved to a blue sheet from the guidance staff, a green sheet from the Year Head, a yellow sheet from the Deputy Head and finally a red sheet from the Headteacher. Although the school justified this in terms of allowing teachers and pupils to live and work together happily, the response was clearly punitive and the guidance staff became a stage in the progression of sanctions. The blue sheet described above was also the attendance sheet. Those who were put on this sheet in relation to truancy would thus be dealt with in the same way as behaviour problems having their conduct monitored on the same sheet.

They must then have their sheet satisfactorily signed for a period of ten days. During observation, discussions between guidance staff and pupils were also seen in this situation and in most cases the contact was relatively brief, but the explanation of the action would be that it was for the pupil's benefit. For some pupils, therefore, in these internal measures, there was a

strong element of punishment, though not readily acknowledged by all but one of the guidance staff. The attendance/behaviour sheets were checked between 8:50am and 9:00am with perhaps 15-20 pupils per house queueing to be seen. At this stage, there was generally little discussion. Any gaps in attendance were questioned, but although in some cases the pupils had forgotten notes or sheets, this was largely ignored (often the pupil would just be reminded of the correct procedure).

Amongst the reasons accepted were : visiting the doctor or dentist (without prior permission), parent forgetting to sign the sheet or even lost sheets. The other action observed was pupils getting a further telling off if they were "insolent".

This introduced a further dimension to the school's dealings with truancy, as gaps in attendance were not taken to indicate the need for any further action for most pupils.

This may have been partly due to what the staff saw as the lack of time available to them to carry out the tasks, the stress of the volume of cases with which they had to deal. Oakbank apparently faced particular problems, as the perception of all the staff was of an especially large amount of non-attendance. At interview and during observation, this difficulty in containing truancy was frequently mentioned, and it was pointed out that there were "safe houses" for truants in the area, reemphasising the extent of the problem :

*the problem is so great here that there is no way we catch everybody.....in this school you could spend your whole day dealing with truancy,*

the situation being that :

*very few kids in the school don't truant for at least a period.*

Partly for this reason, some attempt had to be made to allocate the time available among the pupils.

Given the expressed desire to meet pupils' needs, clearly priority would be given to those whose needs appeared to be the greatest, these being seen to be the longer term truants with correspondingly more serious problems. The staff therefore used the time they had available in the way they felt to be of most benefit, i.e. counselling and contact with these pupils. Short term truancy was not seen to need a great deal of attention, hence the laissez-faire approach, the staff thus allocating their time on the basis of an internally justifiable system of priorities.

Whatever the reason, two types of pupil emerged by this stage, meriting different courses of action :

a. The Short Term Truant With No Apparent Problems

This pupil was seen to be deliberately attempting to break the rules and should be dealt with through a punitive/deterrent/standardised response. This, however, was not seen to pose a serious problem for the school, and the follow up procedures on occasion amounted to little more than laissez-faire.

b. The Short Term Truant with Genuine School Problems

This pupil met with a welfare response, and the staff concentrated on isolating the locus of the problem and discovering an appropriate solution. The approach was flexible and individualized, the purpose to meet the needs of the pupil.

This categorisation continued at the stages which followed, the focus of attention now moving to the parents.

### **Formal External Measures**

Given the nature of internal school measures attempted, it could reasonably be assumed that by the time a case reached the stage of being placed on a Pink Card, the truancy would already fulfil several criteria, namely : the truant would either have truanted previously or the earlier measures attempted would have failed; the cause of the truancy would not be seen to lie within the school; and lastly the truancy would have persisted for a considerable length of time.

In practice, the factor common to all these pupils was the staff notion that the truancy was serious either because of the nature of the problem discovered or purely due to the persistence of the truancy.

The Pink Card, from this premise, then fulfilled several purposes. Firstly, if the sole criterion was that the truancy was protracted, the staff may not have been able to contact the pupil in the school, and may then :

*use the EWO to go to them and find out what's going on*

with a view to having a background knowledge from which to begin to assess the case.

Secondly the staff may have identified problems requiring external agencies, and thirdly the use of this may be less of a positive response to circumstances but rather because previous methods had failed. These may have been disciplinary or problem solving methods, the assumption then being that the causes must lie in the home.

The staff did not, however, correspondingly respond to all these home problems through a problem-solving approach, but continued to distinguish between those who merited welfare and those who must be punished. The measure used, and acknowledged by all the staff now became parental attitude. This was seen to be measurable in several ways.

Five staff mentioned inviting the parent to the school to discuss the truancy when this was considered serious, and if the parents either failed to respond or were unhelpful they were seen to be exhibiting a negative attitude and encouraging their children to truant. The focus and language of the guidance staff would change as would the expressed purpose of the Pink Card. Parents would be seen to be manipulative : (very often they play the system) and the notion of blame emerged, with parents "at fault".

The purpose of the Pink Card for these parents became to get them to realise the seriousness of the matter and to accept their legal responsibility.

If the parents, however, proved to be willing to cooperate with the school, the staff would persist with their problem solving orientation, seeking the most appropriate solution :

*if you can, the best way is to get the home on your side and work with them.*

The staff would then make it possible for discussion and access to take place for these parents and their children. For such cases, there seemed to be easy access to their guidance teacher and a willingness (as stated) to seek them out for discussion. Each house (the two guidance teachers within it) had a classroom in which the guidance work was carried out. This was an ordinary classroom except for containing desks for each guidance teacher and information about pupils. In addition, guidance teachers spent much of their

free time in these rooms, thereby making themselves available.

The size of the room (the classrooms were fairly large) did not act as a deterrent, as the pupil would be invited to sit beside the guidance teacher at the desk. There were some interruptions during discussions, but any pupil coming in would be told when to return and would hear nothing of another pupil's conversation. The condition of privacy, essential to a welfare approach was evident. If anyone other than the guidance teacher was in the room and the pupil did not want this, the other would leave immediately. Also, whether or not the child had previously made an appointment, the needs of the child took precedence over other matters.

Each pupil also always had contact with his/her own guidance teacher and this situation meant that a fairly detailed knowledge of pupils could be built up. The knowledge could be gained by sending round a report form to the staff responsible for the teaching of a particular pupil, but this was in fact rarely used. Also, at the time of observation, the details of pupils' reports were being computerised to be readily available. These formal channels, however, took second place to the personal contact and informal means preferred by the staff who would gain a picture from these discussions.

Formalised records, therefore, formed only a small part of the overall information network in the school, existing largely to document previous contact with other agencies. For those who did meet with a problem solving response the guidance staff collection of information and consideration of circumstances was comprehensive.

The guidance staff at Oakbank were accessible and approachable for these families and although it was impossible to measure their popularity, they

appeared to be trusted and well-liked. Certainly, the type of information that apparently reticent pupils could be coaxed into divulging indicated this. These pupils apparently felt comfortable about seeing their guidance staff and were never dismissed from the guidance rooms when they sought their teacher. In every period where there was a guidance teacher available there would be pupils in and out, and clearly the staff were willing to make themselves available, making the pastoral function apparent.

The division of parents/families into welfare/punitive responses was based at this stage on the staff assessment of parental behaviour, measureable by their willingness to accept the values of the staff and the school.

The EWOs in the school had an arrangement to see the guidance staff weekly, to report on their visits and give the guidance staff the opportunity to report on the school situation. The staff description of the function of the EWO too related to helping cooperative parents and taking a hard line in relation to others.

When the pink cards were examined, it was found that the comments by both staff and EWO were very brief (all the cases were seen during observation to be fully discussed, rendering this unnecessary). The teachers' comments were restricted to a request to "check" absence, but only in the few cases where condoned truancy was suspected were warnings administered :

*mother admits truancy - warned of SAC.*

Where the parent had no knowledge, the SAC action would be postponed until the school/parent had discussed the difficulties and attempted to find a solution. Where such a parental promise was made, however, and not carried



out, a warning would be given immediately. Division into problems and the offenders persisted in assessment of those who should reach the attendance committee. Firstly, the pupils with problems would already have discussed the situation with the school staff who might have attempted internal solutions and the EWO, but the truancy had persisted. The school might either feel that it had exhausted its resources or the problem was such that a different agency would deal with it more satisfactorily. The committee, it was felt should then assess the nature of the problem and make the appropriate referral.

The second type of referral, however, again concerned those cases where parental attitude was seen to be the significant cause. The purpose, as with the Pink Cards changed from the input of help to applying pressure to the parents, to explain "what can happen to them", in terms of prosecution, and thereby "to give them a fright".

The reports provided by the staff to the committee were also examined, and, as expected, the parents were categorised by the staff here, into those who made an effort and those who failed to contact the school. Typical comments in relation to cooperative parents, as expected, related to explanations of causes and descriptions of home circumstances, for example :

*suspect something major is wrong*

and

*home situation recently dramatic,*

describing poverty, drink problems, violence etc, with associated and overtly problem solving recommendations such as :

*suggest strongly that the whole situation needs support*

and

*suggest the family need some kind of statutory help at least in the short term for the sake of their children's health, sanity and education.*

However, in relation to the uncooperative group of parents, the nature of the comments changed to criticism and attribution of responsibility :

*there is very little motivation in the.....household towards school attendance*

and

*this family isn't concerned about education or the lawful need to attend school.*

For these parents the blame is clearly located in their attitudes, the concern that :

*it doesn't do any harm for parents and kids to be given that kind of fright and for somebody other than the school to speak to them.*

The staff throughout remained in broad agreement about the nature of the families and the criteria to be used.

The main reason for referral to the Reporter was seen to be a persistent problem requiring protracted input (although at this stage it should also be noted that in a very small minority of cases a direct referral by the school would have been made if the child was felt to be physically or morally at risk). During observation, a case being considered for direct referral concerned a girl thought to be involved in drug abuse who was also sexually

at risk. It was felt that only the Reporter would have the appropriate resources to deal with such problems.

Most of the cases, however, came from the attendance committee, where either the school would not have the resources to deal with them, or a concrete problem had emerged where often the whole family need a bit of support.

Typical comments on the school reports to the Reporter centred on perceptions of these home circumstances and again stressed the need for the input of help, for example "home situation causes distress" and :

*I feel that both ..... and her mother need support.*

In such cases, the truancy would be understood in the light of these problems. Conversely, the now-familiar group of parents (although smaller) at fault should be dealt with by the Procurator Fiscal. A typical comment was in relation to parental responsibility :

*it's quite clear that if we feel the blame for non-attendance rests with the parents it goes to the Procurator Fiscal - they're not making sufficient effort to ensure regular attendance.*

The purpose, for these parents, as has been becoming clear, is punitive. Two staff went on to complain during interview that many non-attendance referrals to the Fiscal were having no action taken :

*I just feel there has to be something at the end of the line ..... instead of being able to turn round at the end of the day and flick two fingers at the school and the EWO. Almost all mentioned this during informal discussion.*

Two further types of truant would therefore have emerged on the

basis of the assessment of parents.

c. The Longer Term Truant with Home/Environment Problems

This pupil would at all stages have been dealt with by a welfare approach, involving the isolation, if possible, of the problem, and referral to the appropriate agency. Understanding would be attempted throughout.

d. The Longer Term Truant with Uncooperative Parents

The parents of this pupil would from the earliest detection of their lack of cooperation have been dealt with by sanctions/deterrents and by the hostility of the staff. This would be viewed as deliberate behaviour contrary to both the law and the rules of the school.

There was little difference among the staff in the conception of these types, and it was recognised that : we probably all treat truancy in much the same way.

## CHAPTER 5

## ASHDALE

In Ashdale a strong staff commitment to the welfare and development of the pupils guided the decisions taken. This was the predominant response to non-attendance and the justification for the actions taken. Within this response, however, there was some use of sanctions, (seen to be in the pupils' best interests), for those identified as deliberately rule breaking and some evidence also of a laissez faire approach. As in school A, the basis of this distinction was the identification of "types" of truant and the perceived degree of seriousness of the behaviour.

**POLICY AND PURPOSES****The School**

Ashdale Community High School is situated in the north west of the city with a roll of 771, being a full 6 year comprehensive. The school serves a large local authority housing scheme, taking children from four feeder primary schools.

The catchment area of the school is multiply deprived, containing a plethora of social problems of which all staff were conscious, viewing non-attendance in terms of these :

*I can't understand how in some schools you can separate truancy from other aspect of pastoral care, because, to me, if they're truanting that could also hide or lead to other problems.*

Thus the focus of the staff was to attempt to enable the pupils to benefit fully from their school experience:

*we try to match the school to the needs of the children rather than fit the children into the demands of the school*

and this was seen to be best achieved through a concern to be aware of the circumstances of the pupils in their charge. Problem solving was an important part of the task of meeting needs, and this was the main element of their role for all seven staff :

*caring for the children - trying to look after every problem, no matter what.*

In fact dealing with the personal/domestic difficulties of the pupils took precedence over the other aspects of guidance work, with curricular and vocational guidance not being specifically mentioned by any of these staff.

This view suggests a caring, welfare-based approach which was reflected in the overall aims of the schools as presented in the brochure where six aims are outlined : to provide the best opportunities for students to achieve their potential; to increase competence, confidence, cooperation and caring; to provide a curriculum relevant to students' needs; to provide certificate courses for all abilities; to develop a community school and finally to :

*develop a responsible, balanced, varied and enriched lifestyle.*

From this broad outline, the emphasis on students' needs is clear, and this appears to relate to both their academic and social needs. When the objectives of the school are then detailed, these concerns are again reflected :

the creation of a happy, secure and caring environment; development of sound work and study habits; the establishment of a base for vocational training and further education; increasing motivation; helping develop responsible, caring social relationships; helping the pupils gain a sense of values; creating an awareness of rights and responsibilities; widening experience; promoting leisure and community involvement; encouraging parental involvement and promoting self-help.

Not only, therefore, did Ashdale identify their commitment to meeting needs (of both pupils and community), but also detailed what these needs are seen to be (involving a combination of academic and social factors) and the means of achieving these.

Ashdale, therefore, presented itself as a school which was keen to take responsibility for the social development and education of the surrounding community, with a much broader remit than the curricular, examination-based concerns.

### **Guidance Structure**

The guidance structure in Ashdale was vertical for S2-S4 pupils with S1 and S5-6 having their own guidance staff. All students were allocated to one of three houses, and each house had two House Directors (guidance staff). Allocation to houses was by siblings and thereafter randomly.

The task of the guidance team was described as being to counsel and give practical help necessary, suggesting that the guidance staff were seen to expressly deal with the overall welfare of the pupils (although this concern applied to the entire staff in the school).

The presentation of guidance was in terms of the "conventional

wisdom" of curricular, vocational and personal care, with the extension of problem solving to include the parents, in accordance with the element of cooperation. It was pointed out that these Directors "valued regular contact with parents" suggesting an accessible and caring staff with an overall atmosphere of a beneficial school experience for all the pupils.

### **Non-Attendance Options**

The registration system in Ashdale revolved around the pupil's tutor (register teacher). Each house had 9 tutor groups, and S5 and S6 signed themselves in and out. In the morning, a student reported to his/her tutor, who would then send a slip to the house office on which the names of the absentees would be marked.

During the day, each class teacher filled in an absence sheet every period, to be left in the staffroom at the end of the day, and to be checked by the House Directors next morning. The guidance staff were then responsible for filling in the registers, examining and retaining any absence notes. From the registers, it then fell to the guidance staff to identify patterns of absence and then follow these up after 3 days with an absence enquiry, possible internal school measures, the Pink Card, then subsequently from School Attendance Committee to Reporter and Procurator Fiscal.

## **PRACTICE**

### **The Detection Process**

The means of detection and isolation of truancy in Ashdale accorded closely to that outlined in the official policy. Guidance staff acknowledged and carried out their responsibility for isolating pupils who were failing to attend without explanation by examining the registration slips as they arrived and by



marking the registers.

During observation, it was found that generally by 9:00am the slips were with the House Directors (guidance teachers). At this stage, the guidance staff noted any pupils giving cause for concern and would monitor throughout the week the progression of absences for those not in school. The detection of truancy became an ongoing process, the guidance staff being aware of developments for a particular pupil.

The only complaint voiced about the registration system was that the involvement of class teachers, although limited, could cause a delay in the detection of problems, as, on occasion, staff forgot to send the slips, and :

*you get the slips, but they're so persistently late, some of them*

and one guidance teacher suggested that the class teacher may even fail to ask a pupil why he/she had been absent.

This suggests that (a)the guidance staff were keen to quickly isolate truancy and identify pupils for whom action may be necessary and (b)the problem of non-attendance did not have the same high priority for the class teachers.

This registration system was the main method of identifying absentees, but two informal channels also provided information. Firstly, other staff in the school were mentioned as passing on their concerns informally in the staffroom (and during observation it became clear that pupils with problems were frequently discussed with class teachers seeking out guidance staff). Secondly, pupils might inform the guidance staff about colleagues, and during morning registration pupils were eager to explain others' circumstances. These channels clearly imply that staff and pupils were aware of the guidance

commitment to dealing with problems, with an associated willingness to accumulate information and such discussion centring on matters giving cause for concern rather than necessitating disciplinary involvement. It became clear that the guidance staff had a thorough knowledge of the pupils in their charge and viewed their situation as at the centre of a caring team. In practice, this stage of writing to the parent in order to receive a written reason for non-attendance was often bypassed in Ashdale, the reason most often cited for this being the time taken for the letter to reach the pupil's home. All the House Directors felt that it was both more informal and quicker to telephone the parents in order to immediately attempt to enlist their cooperation.

Only where the parent was not on the telephone would the absence enquiry be used, but not in every case, nor routinely after 3 weeks' broken attendance. The staff would first attempt to contact the pupil in order to avail themselves of more information about the circumstances, in order that the approach to parents would be only in cases where their assurance was needed, particularly where a pupil was still absent and thus could not be contacted. The use of the enquiry then became a mechanism for both informing the parents and gathering further information to guide their actions:

*we tend to use absence enquiries more with younger kids, because we've got less information about them and with them we're dealing more with the parents.*

This use of the absence enquiry was consistent with the emergent approach grounded in a concern to discover the reasons for the truancy. There was no attempt to apportion blame, merely to discover quickly whether action was necessary for pupils who may be in difficulties. As one put it :

*there is quite a lot of access to guidance staff in the*

*school..... people talk to you all the time, so you'll have a store of information about what's happening without formal procedures.*

### **Internal School Actions**

Contacting the pupil (if possible) was the preferred initial course for the guidance staff, to give the pupil the opportunity to explain the causes. The subsequent response of the pupil would then guide the action, although it should also be noted that the guidance staff would begin to make a distinction between pupils who are skipping odd periods and those who were absent for several days at a time.

For pupils who had been missing odd periods, the general view was that this was mainly devilment rather than based on any deep seated problems. Many staff talked of deliberate behaviour by the pupils who couldn't be bothered to attend. This related rather to an indiscipline view. The other main perceived cause was difficulty in a particular class. The staff felt that they could distinguish between excuses and genuine difficulties and generally the pupils were honest enough to admit when it was truancy.

Three of the staff mentioned giving the pupils a row and "taking a hard line", the others attempting to keep them on attendance sheets to ensure attendance. All the staff were willing to admit that for some a row would be necessary. Those who found lessons difficult, however, were again met by a caring response which will be discussed later.

Pupils who were absent for longer periods would be assumed to be much more likely to have home/school problems causing this, and often in these cases staff would have both pupils and parents come into school to discuss this. Again the emphasis was on problem solving :

*if the parents are brought in, it's just if we can find out*

*anything at home that could be causing it*

and some attempt would be made to provide help or direct the family to the appropriate channel.

This commitment to eliciting the causes and giving the family an opportunity to explain is again consistent with a practical attempt to deal with truancy through a welfare rather than a punitive approach, the only exception being deliberate period truancy, where no problems could be isolated to solve.

This was, however, much less of a concern for the guidance staff, their real worry being to deal with problem-based truancy. As one put it :

*we don't have many instances of mild truancy. It's either all or nothing. There are very profound reasons usually for the kids truanting. There are not many easy truancy things.*

Following the discussion process, all the guidance staff mentioned the flexibility of the school to deal with school based problems. By this stage the staff would have identified the truancy not based on problems and given the pupil a telling off. Changes might also be considered for other short term truants who give school reasons for the behaviour and for long term truants who have curricular, class problems (although the assumption was that generally long term truants would have more home problems).

For either of these types of truant, a variety of measures may be tried

:

*we can suggest moving class. We might even move house. We can try and change course. We do try.*

All of these measures are attempts to make the school a more pleasant experience for the pupil in order to encourage attendance.

A further internal measure which existed in Ashdale was the Schoolhouse Unit situated half a mile from the school in a block of council flats. This alternative school provided for students with special needs, to give individual help to 12 pupils in a less structured setting. Originally intended for pupils who were likely to be excluded, this was introduced 12 years ago and now takes both disruptive pupils and serious truants.

Within the schoolhouse unit were 2 secondary school flats and a community flat for adults and the aim of allocation was to give those pupils (long term truants) a base to which they could attend, without the pressures of the main school which had been compounding the truancy.

This accorded with the school statement of its willingness to make the school experience suit the individual needs of the pupils and these measures accorded with this aim and with the overall emphasis on recognising and solving problems.

The decision about whether or not to place a pupil on an internal attendance sheet was also taken at the discussion stage and may be used for all the types of truant identified so far. The pupil who was given a row would almost always be given a sheet in order to deter both him/herself and the other pupils in the school from truancy. In these cases the purpose was both deterrent and punitive, in accordance with the view of this type of truancy as breach of discipline rather than an indication of problems.

However, the attendance sheet may also be used for pupils whose school problems had precipitated a change of class, in order to evaluate the effect of the changes and the efficiency of the attempted solution. In this case, the concern was with the treatment approach, and an attempt to ease the

pupil back into full time attendance.

Finally, this was also used following a parental visit or a request by the School Attendance Committee or EWO at a later stage, when problems had been isolated and perhaps an attempt was concurrently being made by another agency to deal with them. Many staff felt the families often found this measure helpful:

*it gives the teachers a chance to give them (the pupils) a pat on the back when they're doing well.*

These sheets would be checked by the guidance staff in the houseroom the following day. During tutor time (registration) many students congregated in their houseroom, but very few were on attendance sheets during the period of observation. The extent of truancy, in fact, in Ashdale was not high, perhaps facilitating the individual assessment of cases and the flexibility of the school in accomodating them. This contributed to the view that truancy, where it was regular, would be based on problems. For those who were, contact was informal and friendly but the sheets were examined closely. Any gaps were questioned by staff and the response to these depended on the reason for the sheet.

Where pupils had been put on a sheet following a "telling off", this would be the reponse again (although no further action would be taken) adding weight to the notion that this type of truancy was a discipline matter. This also indicated, however, that this type of truancy left guidance staff fairly limited in their action and provoked a laissez faire response, at least until the truancy was at a level which would lead to further action - i.e. further counselling and attempts at change.

Where, however, the guidance staff were already aware of problems,

there would be further discussion. During observation, one pupil who had been identified as having difficulties, arrived with gaps in her sheet. She was taken aside and the guidance teacher asked her about her home situation. The girl said that, at the time, her father was drinking heavily, she had found and taken some alcohol, which had provoked a row and a lot of friction in the home. The situation had stabilised again and in this case, having had the episode explained, the guidance teacher had satisfied herself that the home situation was past the crisis, the emphasis for the pupil being on the difficulties faced, rather than the behaviour presented.

The reasons guiding the use of the attendance sheet, therefore, were dependent on the perception (gained during discussion) of the reasons for the absence and the circumstances of the pupil. In general, as with most of the measures, the predominant concern was that:

*we're trying to make kids aware of the fact that they matter  
and it's noticed if they're not there,*

and the methods based on the knowledge the staff had of their circumstances.

### **Formal External Measures**

The same pattern was followed in isolating parents, the perception of the type of case being dependent on earlier discussion with the pupil, but the EWO being sent to investigate further, and hopefully discover any problems which had not been tackled. However, further attempts were made to isolate those who had problems and the purposes of action would be similarly related to these.

Although in Ashdale the staff would occasionally use the yardstick of three weeks broken attendance to issue a Pink Card, again the circumstances

of a case would be the most important factor. The three week period would only be used in cases where the staff felt the truancy was still based in indiscipline rather than problems (seen to be rare). Where the child had no school difficulties, had not responded to a hard line or persistently remained absent whilst on a sheet, after this time period, the EWO would be sent to the home. The purpose of this was to investigate whether there were any problems which had not come to light causing the truancy. Where there were not, the purpose was to "give the pupil a fright" (a further controlling measure), and where there were, it was assumed (given the failure of the preceding measures) that these were outwith the capacity of the school and the sooner the EWO came to be involved the better, with a view to directing the family to the most appropriate measures.

This quick involvement of the EWO in cases where home problems were suspected or identified was a concern for all the staff. In some cases where it had proved impossible to contact the parents (by phone or letter) or when there was insufficient information, again the time period was important:

*three weeks is the criterion you would use if you don't have a clear picture.*

This time period is, however, the vague rule, and would be longer where the staff were aware of a problem which was receiving input to allow this to succeed. It may be quicker if the staff had discovered a problem of a serious nature requiring extra help or further referral. All the staff saw the involvement of the EWO as a stage of information gathering, help and solution/referral elsewhere. The only cases where there was any punitive function was where no problems could be found. Otherwise there was neither mention nor implication of the use of this measure as a threat.



It was repeatedly stressed by the staff that the EWO in the area knew all the families well and had established good relationships with them. His emphasis too was seen by the guidance staff to be on problem solving, entering the home to discover the circumstances and explore various alternatives.

The EWO in Ashdale would see all the guidance staff weekly, although a great deal of the staff contact with him was much less formalised, as he was in the staffroom every morning. Frequently at this time he was approached for discussion and exchange of information. This was consistent with the commitment to taking what was perceived to be the most appropriate form of action as soon as it became apparent this was necessary, and was based on cooperation and sharing of information.

When the Pink Cards were examined, the most apparent feature was that the teachers had written no comments on their sections. It was explained during observation that this is in order to explain fully the situation to the EWO, reemphasising the joint approach to problem solving and detailed, individualistic knowledge of pupils. (However, this may be problematic during staff absence.) The EWO's comments related to any problems he had encountered, the reasons given for the absence and the intended action. Only in three cases where four to five visits had elicited no reply was a warning letter sent.

These records correspond with the finding that the purpose of the Pink Card varied with the perception of the type of truancy involved - a warning to those who were not exhibiting any problems, an information gathering mechanism for those who had failed to respond to requests for discussion and a means of assessing the type of help required and referring

pupils with home problems to the appropriate agency. In all but the "deliberately rule breaking" cases, the emphasis was on the caring approach, the view of truancy as symptomatic of other problems and the need to direct the families to the appropriate help. The "traditional approach" only became a response following the opportunity to receive help. Part of the school policy at Ashdale involved the encouragement of the pupil's guidance teacher to attend these committees and all the staff had knowledge of the functioning of these. The purpose was described as follows :

*it's looked on as an opportunity to explore the situation further,*

based on the assumption that the EWO would have felt that there was further action necessary which could not be dealt with either by him or by the school.

The perceived reasons for sending a pupil to the committee were twofold. It would be called quickly if there was no other means of getting the information (if neither school nor EWO could contact the parent and otherwise when the problem could not be solved by other means.

Although three staff felt that this measure was sometimes interpreted by the parents as a threat, the staff preferred to view this stage as part of the process of discovering the best individual solution. Thus, the staff described the nature of the action as centering on :

*the reality of personal problems*

and the hope that further clarification of the situation might emerge.

The main concerns apparent in the school reports to the Attendance Committees related to the effect on the individual pupil of the truancy. The comments about the parents suggested that most had been in contact with

the school (bearing out the guidance staff emphasis on early discussion) and in most cases, problems in the home were documented. The parents, even if they failed to attend school discussion were assumed to have problems :

*most of the kids that we're speaking about are your poorer ones whose parents never come up.*

The staff felt that these parents' unwillingness to visit the school should be dealt with through the opportunity to explore the reasons for this.

At the school attendance committee, however, although each should begin with the assumption that the purpose was a problem solving one, all of the staff felt that the members could begin to make a distinction between parents who were genuinely facing difficulties (the majority) and those who deliberately condoned the behaviour. This should then form the basis of the decision in terms of whether to refer the parent (if condoning) to the Procurator Fiscal.

The same distinction into types of parents (in terms of whether or not the behaviour was deliberate), was felt by the guidance staff to be the means to guide the referral to these agencies. By this stage, two types of truant (in the view of the staff) would remain.

Firstly, there would be those with home problems so severe that the Reporter was seen to be the appropriate course of action. The role of the Reporter was seen in welfare terms, having :

*access to resources and facilities that we don't have access to  
..... it would be providing access to other things,*

and

*they can be helpful in finding a more appropriate educational setting for the kid, or a more appropriate home for the kid, or it may help the child to see the parent's point of view.*

Although two of the staff mentioned an association between truancy and delinquency, this was not seen to be indicative of a need for punishment. This was taken to be symptomatic of the problems causing the truancy.

Thus the Reporter's department was seen to be :

*very helpful....you're trying always to work out what is best for that child, and that's what's uppermost in my mind. Their main aim, to help the child, is uppermost, and that's fine.*

All the measures available to the Reporter were seen to be based on a paternalistic concern with the child's best interests. The only complaint about the measures was that the problem faced by all the caring professions was a resource limitation which reduced the alternatives available.

The school reports to the Reporter reflected the preceding concerns. There was a strong emphasis on home circumstances (highlighting the knowledge of the guidance staff and the extent of previous discussion). Problems mentioned related to poverty, alcoholism, parents in prison, pupils living with grandparents, fights in the home, heroin abuse, glue sniffing and girls drifting into prostitution. These were the types of case with which the school felt unable to deal and for whom the Reporter was seen to offer more appropriate help.

Referral to the Procurator Fiscal, on the other hand, was seen to be a negative course of action, all the staff being unhappy with this measure. However, this was seen to be the only course available for the other "type" of

family, where the parent was refusing to cooperate and no home problems could be isolated. A link was made between these parents and pupils identified earlier whose truancy was "devilment", being by this stage more "serious", by virtue of being prolonged. These pupils would all have received "rows" at an earlier stage, often would have been placed on attendance sheets and would have made no attempt to return to school. The parent would be :

*blatantly ignoring all advice to get their children to school*

and the staff felt a sense of failure when this happened :

*it has the effect of making them very angry. it does not have the effect of sending the kids to school. In fact it starts a vendetta really.*

However, the staff felt that some attempt had to be made to return these pupils and they argued that the Reporter would take no action where there were no obvious problems. All that remained was the option of prosecution, and even here, for these staff, the notion of punishment took second place to expressions of frustration about the lack of possible courses of action.

**CHAPTER 6****BIRCHWOOD**

In Birchwood High School, a majority (although not all) (6/10) of the staff and the school as a whole presented as fully accepting the conventional wisdom of the guidance function, emphasising the caring nature of the role, with an expressed concern to maintain and promote vocational and curricular high standards in the school. In practice, the school was operating a system of almost total "correction" in relation to truancy (which was acknowledged openly by the remaining 4 staff) centring largely on the use of threat and punishment to return pupils. In practice, all the staff performed this function, their main concern being with retaining "good" pupils and furthering the "problem free" image of the school.

**POLICY AND PURPOSES**

The presentation of the overall ethos of the school and the apparent commitment to "conventional wisdom" was evident in school policy, the pastoral function for most staff seemingly combining with academic and vocational concerns.

**The School**

Birchwood High School is situated in the south west of the city with a roll of 1289, covering all stages of secondary education. Although Birchwood takes pupils from all socio-economic groups, the catchment area is predominantly middle class and the staff felt most of the families were free of any serious home problems.

"Traditional" values of authority and academic hard work were seen to be important factors, the staff being proud to teach in a "good" school, and at

interview the guidance staff stressed the academic prowess of the school considering this to be an important feature. It was pointed out that the academic record of the school was above average and the proportion of pupils going on to further education high.

Many felt this was an important consideration for the parents in the area, as well as for the pupils, who were generally felt to accept these aims, certainly suggesting that curricular and vocational functions would form an important part of guidance work. In relation to truanting pupils, the majority of guidance staff (6) expressed their role in terms of the "conventional wisdom", although 4 expressed their role in terms purely of discipline. Those who fell into the first group expressed their role in terms of the official guidance functions :

*developing relationships with the children and managing their problems and difficulties*

providing advice and counselling to :

*try to get to know the kids, and once you've got to know them, try and help them in their own personal, social development,*

and one stated with a degree of cynicism that it involved :

*jargonese social, moral, curriculum, careers advice.*

The use of these terms by most staff suggests that the school view of guidance was in accordance with the conventional wisdom of pastoral care, although a small minority saw their role somewhat differently.

In terms of the educational aims of the school, the emphasis was predominantly on academic considerations :

*A school is concerned with the general education and not just with specific courses leading to particular careers.....consequently we encourage pupils to keep as many career options open as possible by choosing a balanced course up to the age of sixteen,*

the brochure stressing that the school was keen to foster contact with the parents, beginning by giving them as much information as possible. Thus, as well as the general information concerning staff, session dates and holidays, school information and facilities, the curricular choices are set out in detail, as are the methods of assessment used.

Parents were then encouraged to ensure that the children develop sound attitudes by getting them to watch documentaries, read good books and newspapers. This was seen to provide the informal side of learning, where school :

*provides the more formal part of education*

with parents encouraged to understand the courses offered.

The school, therefore, apparently had two concerns - that of developing (in academic terms) the pupils to their fullest potential, and with the majority of guidance staff, whilst accepting this, committed to helping with problems and difficulties through sympathy and understanding.

### **Guidance Structure**

The guidance system operated in Birchwood was vertical, each house containing pupils in years 1-6. One principal and three assistant principal teachers had responsibility for the organisation of the house, together with the register teachers. Here, the emphasis was on the development of the pupil :

*It should assist each pupil to develop his full potential, to make good choices and decisions and to cope with the various transitions from primary to secondary school, from schoolwork to further*



*education and perhaps more important from childhood to adulthood.*

This statement of guidance function was a clear recognition of the broad prevailing guidance philosophy in the three spheres identified in the literature. This was expressly stated by the school in the same identification of curricular, vocational and personal guidance and reinforced the apparent overall ethos of the school which attempted to combine a concern for the welfare of the pupils with the maintainance of examination successes (both tasks falling into the remit of the guidance department).

It does seem, however, that a division existed amongst the guidance staff in beliefs and attitudes about the interpretation of their task, which might in turn affect their actions. In practice this division disappeared. The practical operation of the guidance department will now be considered following an outline of the alternatives available to the school specifically in relation to truancy.

### **Non-Attendance Options**

The registration and monitoring system operated in Birchwood should be, in the first instance, the responsibility of the pupil's register teacher, and a computer system was operated. Each pupil in the school had a code number and would be registered in the morning, then attendance would be followed throughout the day with a check in every class. The computer printout showing those absent was available the following day and would be returned to the register teacher, who should then check to discover the reasons for the absence. The subsequent referrals identified earlier follow. The view taken was

:

*that in the final analysis, parents must take a major role in*

*ensuring their children conduct themselves in a way which reflects well on the school and their families*

and

*parents are responsible for ensuring that their child attends school regularly.....in cases of unsatisfactory attendance the Headteacher will ask an Education Welfare Officer to visit the home..... where unsatisfactory attendance persists, the Headteacher..... will decide whether the case should be referred to the School Attendance Committee of the School Council. This committee has powers to carry out the statutory responsibilities of the authority with regard to defaulting parents.*

Thus, within the guidance function, there was a concern to ensure firm discipline and high standards of behaviour, stressing that failure to conform would result in the application of sanctions. Alongside these concerns was the provision of a guidance department presented as performing the accepted guidance functions of support and advice. The interaction of these concerns will be discussed in relation to the operation of the procedures for dealing with truancy in the school, the control function beginning to emerge.

## **PRACTICE**

In practice, as suggested, welfare concerns disappeared. The process was essentially in 2 stages - dealing with pupils and with parents. All were seen to be offending. Truancy was a deliberate act and the actions taken reflected the perception first of deviant pupils then of recalcitrant parents. Guidance staff spent little time dealing with truancy, preferring to concentrate on their valuable pupils.

It will become apparent that when dealing with truancy, those staff who at least acknowledged welfare concerns were indistinguishable from those who did not, reverting to discussions of their disciplinary/administrative

role. In practical terms, none saw "counselling" as being appropriate for truancy, the main purpose being to get pupils back to school.

### **The Detection Process**

In practice, the process of detection fell to the register teachers, who would check attendance the following day and set in motion the next stage. The guidance staff on the whole would be unaware of this action.

In a small minority of cases a member of guidance staff may be first to notice an emergent pattern of non-attendance (they received a copy of the printout and may then check the registers), but in these cases, too, would then contact the register teacher for further information. Indeed in observation during the registration period there was little activity in the guidance department and no duties relating to the detection of non-attendance.

The fact that the guidance staff left this task almost wholly to the register teacher does not in itself imply a lack of willingness to investigate pupils' problems. As much of this stage involved routine enquiries and checking, it could equally be assumed that this was seen to be outwith the guidance remit, being merely an administrative duty. However, one guidance teacher actually suggested the whole process might not be as tight as they would like :

*although the register teacher gets the attendance printout,  
quite a few of them don't pay it a great deal of attention,*

and another stated that :

*I would have to say honestly that there are some pupils who  
are regarded with pleasure or delight when they truant,*

evidence of a laissez-faire approach to discipline problems.

This was also the case for impending S4 leavers, with whom the staff again did not wish to become involved – this was stated many times at interview and during informal discussion. No measures were used for these pupils and the staff made no attempt to follow this up. (This apparently was not solely a staff decision, as it was pointed out the the EWOs would not accept Pink Cards for these pupils, but the staff did not instigate internal measures either and the end result was unchecked truancy). Only when truancy was detected was formalised and visible action taken.

These examples begin to raise questions about this commitment to welfare. Indeed this may be related to the more predominant concern with the “image” of the school. The staff, as seen equated a good school with a problem-free academic school, and assumed the parents shared these values. In an atmosphere of ability to make placing requests and the desire to be seen to be a popular school, the staff assumed that admitting to a residue of deviant behaviour reflected badly on the school, and were keen to repeatedly stress that :

*fortunately we have very few serious truants.*

The attitudes, real or perceived of these parents must be a factor, and this perhaps partly explains their unwillingness to recognise difficult pupils and their wish to concentrate on those who do attend.

Once their own justifications were explored, some further questions were raised in relation to their expressed commitment. It was suggested by the guidance staff that the register teachers would know more about the pupils than they would and could therefore instigate discussion and take action. Even in cases where guidance staff themselves detected the non-attendance, they would refer back to the register teacher for information.

Knowledge would seem to be central to a welfare approach and full background information is necessary for any real attempt to deal with causal factors.

This lack of knowledge and separation of tasks would appear to hamper the "caring" approach which would demand thorough awareness of the circumstances of the pupils in their charge. Many of the pupils in the school would not be well known to their guidance staff.

The records in Birchwood were the basic source of information, but the collection of information was not a central part of the response. These records were kept in the guidance room but when examined contained only primary school reports, any other reports and sometimes old attendance books. These were often very flimsy, with no background information about the pupils, only supplying knowledge of previous difficult behaviour.

Informal passing of information was negligible, and thus if one staff member was aware of background factors which might be affecting behaviour, it would take a specific effort to seek out and inform the guidance teacher concerned. Communication amongst guidance staff was difficult, as many chose to spend their lunch and tea breaks elsewhere. The guidance staff who dispersed, did so to departmental rooms, limiting their contacts to staff of the same discipline.

Many were therefore seen only when on duty. Further to this, it was not unknown for staff to be either marking subject work or discussing their classes during this time. Certainly, there was often little activity in the guidance room during these periods and very seldom did pupils come in. This too indicated the guidance staff may not recognise their problem solving role.

The absence enquiry was also outwith the scope of the guidance department. It was only if no reply or an unsatisfactory reply (a non-medical reason in law) was received that the case would be referred. Again this was seen as an administrative formality, a precursor to guidance action. The procedure was routinised and dependent on the statutory 3 days' absence, the only purpose being to establish whether or not a pupil was legitimately absent.

It was clear that a decision had been made by the guidance staff in Birchwood to allow the register teachers to deal through the formal channels with truancy in its early stages. There was no attempt to consider individual circumstances.

### **Internal School Actions**

The stage and means of guidance involvement at Birchwood actually varied according to the member of staff, but following the absence enquiry some guidance action would ensue. The guidance staff might then choose to either talk to the pupil or use an irregular attendance book, perhaps both. This would then appear to be the stage where "personal guidance" would be appropriate.

However, although for the majority of staff (7) the first stage in dealing with truancy was to contact the pupil, for 3 there was no such contact. For the 7 for whom discussion did take place, it was to warn the pupils about future behaviour and to reprimand them. The general feeling was that on most occasions this would end the non-attendance :

*In most cases, that's the end of it - they're so astonished to be caught first time that they will stop*

None of the guidance staff mentioned any attempt to discover the causes of the truancy at this point, and three assumptions can be made. Firstly, the case is, at least to this stage, not perceived to be in need of guidance, being a minor problem of deliberate rule-breaking. Second, the school's response to this is to use sanctions and take punitive/deterrent measures, and thirdly, it is the guidance staff at Birchwood who are responsible for putting these punitive measures into effect. The departure from the "conventional wisdom" and the welfare approach they stated they adhered to was clear. In fact, the relative emphasis the staff gave to welfare/punishment was not a factor in separating those who did and did not discuss the nature of the action.

The nature of the guidance room itself would not have been conducive to this, being situated at ground level in one of the teaching blocks facing a noisy corridor where generally pupils congregated between classes. The room itself was large, all the guidance staff having desk space at which to work. Even having got past the initial communication over the counter, once within the room, the other staff present would be able to hear the conversation clearly, and the large open space with the other staff often sitting talking and drinking coffee would make the discussion of difficulties a daunting prospect for a pupil.

The staff made no attempt to deal with these difficulties, often administering loud reprimands in front of a large group of pupils. This fits with their limitation to a role of deterrence and discipline. This then indicated the perceived need to deal with deviant behaviour in a way that could be seen by others, in order that the behaviour does not amplify.

In fact during observation it became clear that there was little interest

in attempting internal changes in the school, with many of the staff being against the notion of special provision :

*they reckon they are improving the situation by pandering if you like to their likes and dislikes,*

founded on the belief that the pupils choose to defy the authority of the school and based on the need to induce conformity, as :

*part of the school is to learn to tolerate boredom.*

This was used in Birchwood often at the same time as a warning was given. It was used by the same 7 staff following the re-emergence of truancy after the initial warning. The most obvious and indeed the most used reason was where it was felt some monitor was necessary and the yardstick by which this was measured would be whether the child had any periods of truancy in the past. The guidance staff felt this to be crucial to maintain discipline. By this stage there was no evidence of staff performing the pastoral function, all the staff attempting to end the behaviour through the threat of punishment.

One further reason mentioned by the guidance staff for the use of this measure was following an external request from the parent or School Attendance Committee.

During observation, several days were spent in the guidance room at 3.45p.m. watching attendance books being signed. This task was carried out by whichever member of staff was available (rather than necessarily the pupil's own guidance teacher) and if the teacher was not satisfied (generally because of a missing signature or badly damaged books), the response observed would again be punitive.



The pupil would be sent to get the relevant signature or extra days would be added to the book. If this had happened previously, the pupil would be placed on detention.

Discussion during these periods was minimal, and often the teacher concerned did not know the pupil. One guidance teacher, on issuing a new attendance book to a pupil did so without explanation to the girl, who snatched it from him. The guidance teacher called her an impudent brat and told her that the staff had to waste their time dealing with her attendance.

Many of the guidance staff at Birchwood mentioned the lack of time available for dealing with pupils, stressing that as well as their work in relation to truancy, there were many other functions to be carried out (again perhaps indicating the low priority of problem behaviour). Several staff mentioned that they did not have time to sit and talk to the pupils about any problems, but exactly what these other duties were was unclear, appearing to be subject related, with marking popular. Some of the guidance-related administrative functions were also carried out and at the time of observation there was a lot of concern with course choice forms and options for pupils. There were also staff who treated their time in the guidance room as a "free" period. However, all these other functions were seen to be more important in the allocation of time than truancy. As one said :

*if you want my honest opinion, I think we spend too much time on truancy - I don't think it's that important.*

All pupils, therefore, were seen to require the same discipline/control response, even this being seen to be a waste of guidance time.

### Formal External Measures

Three of the guidance staff would have bypassed the earlier measures, making no attempt to find internal solutions in the school. For these staff, first contact would be via the Pink Card.

This group used this measure both as an absence enquiry in itself, and as a means of alerting the family to formal action. The EWO would then make a home visit. As one put it :

*when I first had this job, I was more inclined to contact the parent myself. I'm more inclined to get the EWO's help at an earlier stage now partly because we've got so many other things to do.*

This group of staff therefore, effectively passed the case on immediately. This was observed in practice when one girl was put on a Pink Card when her guidance teacher felt she was a possible truant following odd days of unexplained absence. This enquiry was the first attempt to contact the home, and the girl's father was claiming to be distressed by the EWO's visit and concerned about the effect on her future references, and was merely told it was being used as an enquiry.

Those staff involved used this as an information-gathering exercise, effectively opting out of the truancy process altogether.

Even those staff who had previous contact with the pupil were using Pink Cards partly to obtain further information - to confirm the truancy given the scant knowledge of the pupil available.

The majority of staff also mentioned a second purpose which was to emphasise to parents the statutory requirement of school attendance :

*pupils do have to come to school, and it's probably quite a good thing if the parent is made aware that this is not just the school*

*doing this, that this is a statutory duty.*

For most of the staff (8), this contact with the parent also involved an implicit threat if the parents failed to cooperate. These staff saw the role of the EWO as one of assessing the attitude of the parent and pointing out their legal obligations. As one put it

*the fact that the name has changed (from School Attendance to Education Welfare Officer) suggests that they see their role as much more than we might.*

Only 2 mentioned :

*the approach being we are concerned rather than this is entirely wrong,*

and although these 2 members of staff attributed to the EWO something of a problem-solving orientation, their own approach was restricted to discipline and referral. Even they saw the welfare role as restricted to other agencies and persisting only until the pupil has had a chance to improve. When this failed, these staff, too, saw more punishment as necessary.

Wide differences in staff contact with the EWO were discovered during observation. The EWO visited the guidance room regularly but many of the staff preferred to spend free time in Departmental staff rooms. One group of staff (generally 5-6) spent a lot of time in the guidance department but others would rarely be seen. Those based in the guidance room would be told of the EWO's actions (although this did not seem to affect their own actions). The others would leave messages in his pigeon hole and pass on cards for him to collect. As one stated :

*I really don't have time to go chasing him up.*

On Pink Cards, teachers' comments were brief, all of them simply requesting

that the EWO visit the home and confirm a suspicion of truancy. From the EWO's comments, it was clear that unless a medical reason was given, the parents were :

*warned of the consequences of irregular attendance,*

suggesting that the EWO was either guided by the instructions/requests of the guidance staff or shared their interpretation of their role. No discussion of home circumstances was found.

The consequences of the lack of staff/EWO communication were also apparent on two of the cards where the EWO had found he had visited the homes unnecessarily. For example, he had to remind the staff that :

*if medical certificates are handed in to the school, they should be returned to me for filing.*

The recurrent theme emerged that the guidance staff neither got closely involved nor spent a lot of time with the problem, even if they acknowledged (as only two did) that at least on the first EWO visit the case may need welfare measures from an outside agency.

This persists in the attitude to the Attendance Committee, although in general when the staff had one of their pupils going forward, they claimed they would attend (although it emerged that three had never been to a meeting). The overall policy was that it was beneficial to give the school account. As with previous measures, all the guidance staff saw this stage as formal and punitive, suggesting at interview that a committee should be called quickly. This perhaps explains the early warnings administered by the EWO, as two such warnings are necessary before the committee can be called.

Even for the two staff who acknowledged the EWO as having a welfare function, if there was not a subsequent immediate return of the pupil this was taken to indicate that punitive measures were necessary and all the staff agreed that this measure was intended to deal with recalcitrant parents. There was a perceived need for serious and more severe measures :

*the main purpose is to put the onus on to the parents and make it clear to them that they would have to take the consequences if there's not an improvement.*

This threat of the consequences now directed at the parents as it had been previously at the pupils, was repeated by all the staff.

The staff felt the committee should establish blame, its effectiveness judged by the severity of the measures employed. The general feeling was that the committee was not fulfilling the school's purpose, as it "has very little threat", although :

*it can be fairly sobering, which isn't a bad thing.*

Many of the staff expressed displeasure at the power of the committee to adjourn a case for six weeks in order to give the pupil an opportunity to return to school. This was seen to be giving the pupils a chance to manipulate the school and defy authority, rather than helping them to solve any problems :

*for youngsters, if they want to play the system, they'll beat the system.*

The staff felt that welfare concerns and actions were tantamount to letting them off with it, feeling that the committee should have more teeth and take a "harder line".

Although very few reports to the School Attendance Committee were

found, in all cases comments suggested that the non-attendance was hindering academic progress. A further feature common to all the referrals was a criticism of the parents and the implication that they were unwilling to come to school. For example :

*slow to come in when asked*

*it would appear that Mrs.....condones these absences*

*.....'s difficulties seem to be a direct result of his mother's behaviour/personality and family circumstances*

*Mrs.....does not seem to accept that ..... 's attendance is her responsibility.*

Again there was the notion of deliberate encouragement to truant. In all cases, by this stage, the parent was seen to be either unconcerned or unwilling to alter the situation. There was at no stage any emphasis on the use of the attendance committee to explore the family situation.

All the staff felt that where further action was necessary, it should be taken within the Children's Hearing system.

Outwardly, therefore, it seemed that the staff were now operating on welfare based concerns, but when the reasons for referral and criteria were examined, the apparent contradiction lessened. There was a general confusion amongst the guidance staff as to the Reporter's function, and four of the staff described the purpose in punitive terms (three feeling it was to deal with the parents). For these staff, the purpose again was to threaten with the consequences of non-attendance.

The criteria for referral to the Reporter were straightforward - when an earlier threat had failed, they felt there was a need for a progressively

heavier sanction. All these pupils' families were seen to be :

*dyed in the wool hard cases*

and the success of the panel was also measured by willingness to take firm action. This was seen to be one of the shortcomings of the Reporter's Department :

*the real hard liners, I don't think the panel's going to change it, because the kids know that nothing's going to hit them.*

Two other groups of staff were identified here, one comprising three staff who did describe the Reporter's function in problem solving terms, but then proceeded either to reemphasise that the main purpose was to force the pupil back to school, or to complain about the Reporter's adoption of this approach :

*I don't know if their hands are tied because of the lack of spaces in assessment centres and List D schools, but it seems to me that's the case. They come up with some queer decisions.*

Finally, two staff merely saw this as a progression from the failure of other methods, when the school can't cope or has exhausted its resources.

The reports again emphasised the danger to schoolwork of prolonged absence (this was clearly a significant concern in this school) and attempts to "play the system" were recognised as the main reason for prolonged non-attendance. The parents had either lost control of their children, had stopped trying or were aggressive and uncooperative (often all of these). There was a stress on :

*accumulated misdeeds*

and pupils who would not :

*see the error of (their) ways.*

This notion of the necessity of realising the behaviour was wrong was apparent in many cases :

*I have never known.....to feel any remorse after exhibiting such behaviour*

Children were described variously as being :

*a plausible rogue and a liar*

or

*associating with the wrong company, people like ..... of this school who is known to the panel.*

A final concern which emerged at this stage was the effect on others of unchecked truancy :

*she could affect others who see her apparently getting off scot free and apparently immune from any firm action.*

The needs of the majority of pupils in the school, who must be discouraged, were important :

*it's quite clear from some classes that if you've got one person who's truanting and gets away with it, then later on it does spread.*

One of the guidance teachers offered what s/he took as an example of this spread :



*I can show you registers where one child who has been truanting for ten years has encouraged other children to truant because they don't see any action being taken against her.*

Given the criteria which, for the most part, guided referral to the Reporter, the use of this method was not antithetical to the overall approach of the guidance staff in the school.

There was an even less clearly developed understanding of the role of the Procurator Fiscal. This measure was used rarely, the staff seeing the Children's Hearings as serving the necessary punitive purpose :

*our normal experience is of the Children's Hearing .....  
this would suggest that the child has committed some offence.*

The assumption is that the Procurator Fiscal would be even less likely to take action:

*if a threat is there, and a punishment is there, and it's never used, then there's no point in having it.*

**CHAPTER 7****BAYVIEW**

Bayview High School adopted a view of truancy and the related processes which was devoid of any attempt at problem solving, despite a stated concern on the part of the guidance staff with adopting a counselling approach. In fact the staff were predominantly interested in upholding the reputation of the school, using social control/law enforcement to do so. The staff divided pupils into good and "bad" (attenders and truants) and parents into "good" (attenders), supportive but ineffectual (who had initially seemed "good" but who could not end the truancy) and "bad" (condoning the truancy). All these families were referred to external agencies for what staff saw as "appropriate" law enforcement.

**POLICY AND PURPOSES****The School**

Bayview High School is situated in the north east of the city, drawing pupils from six local primary schools, as well as attracting a high number of placing requests under the Parents' Charter. This school was the largest of the four visited, having a roll of 1722 pupils, divided into two sections, the main school (S2-6) and the annexe (S1), together making Bayview High School a six year comprehensive.

The area served by Bayview, although containing a mixture of social backgrounds, was predominantly middle class and seen by the staff to be a "good" area. It was felt by the staff that most of the parents in the area held the view that the school should maintain high standards of discipline and academic success, sharing the values and supporting the activities of the staff.

This was reflected in school attempts to :

*encourage parents to take a close interest in their child's progress.*

The eleven guidance staff described their purpose in the school as concerned with the pastoral, problem-solving nature of their work.

All the staff mentioned this as a central function, whether expressing this as part of the conventional wisdom (as 5 did) for example :

*trying to advise them in their educational choices, social problems, personal problems, vocational problems*

or seeing their sole concern, as 6 did, as being :

*the social welfare of the children....to be concerned about anything concerning the individual pupil which prevents them getting the opportunities here, whether it be problems at home or social problems.*

All 11 staff, therefore acknowledged their role as counsellors and talked mainly of their personal guidance function, locating their tasks firmly in pastoral care terms.

However, in further descriptions of the school, they did express their perceptions in terms of the pupils who attended. The staff appeared, both at interview and informally to feel that the school had a better than average academic record and although there was a range of ability from "high fliers" through to those requiring special help, the bottom was seen to be small. A typical comment was that :

*I think the educational standards of the school are, as you would expect, quite good.*

This was partly seen to relate to the school composition and partly to the

parents' attitudes (which valued academic achievement). These three factors, academic prowess, social class and parental attitude were seen to be closely related, and the staff generally felt that the majority of pupils were from good homes in terms of these measures.

Not surprisingly in the light of this, career choice and curricular guidance were also mentioned by many staff as forming a large part of their role .

In terms of overall educational aims of the school, this pride in the academic performance of the school is clear, as it is pointed out to parents that :

*for many pupils, there will be an obvious emphasis on acquiring qualifications.*

However, clearly by staff and school, there is also a recognised, less formal, social aspect to the school's task. This was presented as an apparent concern with making each pupil's experience beneficial, in turn suggesting a concern with meeting their needs, although the predominant means of achieving this appears to be the responsibility of the pupils :

*we encourage a spirit of cooperation and tolerance, hard work and self-reliance, believing these qualities important.*

However, theoretically, the three aspects of the conventional wisdom were acknowledged :

*although this school is a large one, we seek to ensure that every pupil can have advice and help on problems concerning schoolwork, career choice or personal worries,*

and that staff build up relationships with pupils over the years and :

*seek always to be accessible to pupils for interviews and advice.*

Difficult behaviour was, however, discouraged :

*Most of our pupils behave well most of the time because they wish to, but on occasion it is necessary for staff to apply sanctions. We use many types of punishment depending on the nature of the nature of the offence. These range from verbal reprimands or lines to supervision. Pupils who regularly get into trouble may be put on a conduct sheet timetable for a time.....difficult pupils may be referred to Principal teachers (subject), Guidance teachers, Year Heads, the Depute Head teacher or the Head.*

Such behaviour was seen to be the deliberate choice of the pupil, and the necessary response based on punitive concerns. The guidance staff had a part to play in administering these punishments, being the second stage in the hierarchy of seriousness and adding an additional dimension to their role.

Parents were also warned of the consequences of non-attendance :

*Parents are responsible for ensuring that their child attends school regularly. In cases of unsatisfactory attendance, the Headteacher will ask an EWO to visit the home.....where unsatisfactory attendance persists, the Headteacher.....will decide whether the child should be referred to the School Attendance Committee of the School Council. The committee has powers to carry out the statutory responsibilities of the authority with regard to defaulting parents.*

The view therefore emerged of various apparent purposes in the school which seem on first consideration to be contradictory. The school had a predominantly academic orientation, within which a system of rules and sanctions existed to further this end, of which the need for attendance was presented as one. Rule-breaking in any form, by pupils or parents was dealt with punitively (the emphasis being on individual self-reliance, choice and consequently culpability). Provision, however, of a guidance department and the acknowledgement of the need for curricular, vocational and personal

guidance existed alongside this, but the activity seems to be viewed entirely separately from the discipline function. The irrelevance of the distinction will become clearer.

### **The Guidance Structure**

Bayview operated a horizontal system of guidance, with pupils organised around year groups. Each year was served by an Assistant Head and 1-3 guidance staff, depending on the year (1 for S5/6, 2 for S3/4 and 3 for S1 and 2).

These staff :

*work closely together and get to know the pupils very well.*

Each of these groups had the use of a year area where the pupils congregated for registration and during intervals and lunchtimes.

### **Non-Attendance Options**

Responsibility for registration in Bayview rested with the Group Tutor (register teacher) who should in the morning, manually mark those who were absent on a sheet and send a note of the names of the missing pupils to the school office. The attendance should then be marked on the official registers which were kept in the adjacent year offices.

Following registration, the School Office would draw up a list of absent pupils which was distributed to every class, to monitor attendance throughout the day and to detect period absences. Staff members were then asked to indicate any pupils coming in or going out throughout the teaching periods providing information on any changes they recorded. At the end of the day, the office staff would separate the lists into year groupings and send a copy to the appropriate member of the guidance team.

The Group Tutor then had the responsibility for sending out the absence enquiry letter after three days' unexplained absence, and if the parent failed to respond or the response was unsatisfactory, the official procedure was that the group tutor should then discuss the case with the guidance teacher. An internal attendance card system was then operated, followed by the Region's Pink Card administered by the EWO after 3 weeks' broken attendance. The possible course was then progression to the School Attendance Committee, Reporter and Procurator Fiscal.

## **PRACTICE**

In practice, the staff opted out of the truancy process after detection.

### **The Detection Process**

The division of pupils started even at this stage - good pupils (selected by previous behaviour and staff knowledge, also implicitly by ability) and "bad" pupils who were "difficult" being identified. All the "truants" would go on to statutory measures.

In practice, the involvement of the guidance team at the earliest stages of monitoring absenteeism was substantial. The actual process of registration in the morning was carried out by the Group Tutor but the detection of truancy appeared to be a "guidance task".

All the guidance staff stated that their main suspicion of deteriorating attendance stemmed from their regular weekly register check, where they would find evidence of unexplained absence. Only a small minority of truanting pupils would be isolated and passed on via the group tutor.

The guidance staff also felt they were largely responsible for the detection of "in-school" truancy (their term for occasional period missing),

through the slips passed to them at the end of the day. Only one of the guidance staff mentioned the informal passing of information by the class teachers and it was clear during observation that this was not a widespread practice in the staffroom.

The explanation given for the reliance on guidance staff for the detection of truancy was the lack of interest on the part of the register teacher. In fact, during observation, the alleged disinterest did appear to be in evidence, with the process of registration appearing to be haphazard and rushed.

The process took place in the pupils' year area at 8:40am, where approximately 200 pupils would be registered. The pupils gathered, supposedly in their correct class groupings, while the group tutors for the pupils in that year walked amongst them with their registers, attempting to discover which pupils were absent. Many of the Group Tutors arrived late (a complaint made by the Assistant Headteacher at interview) thereby registering pupils at the last minute, and in one case, a Group Tutor was seen to rely on asking the friends of one of the pupils whether they had seen him that morning. During this short period, any "pastoral care" by the group tutor was also supposed to take place, as well as any daily notices being read out to the pupils.

From this practical operation of the detection and isolation of truancy, several factors emerge. Firstly, if there was a commitment to identifying and tackling truancy, this was confined to the guidance staff and did not extend to the register teachers. Secondly, what seemed initially to be tight procedures for the discovery of truancy, clearly allowed scope for some to remain undetected. With the possibility of lack of Group Tutors' communication, failure to scrutinise daily slips and unwillingness to stringently record



information, this situation may be exacerbated.

The Assistant Headteacher alluded to this problem, suggesting that a truanting pupil, especially short term, could easily remain undetected and that there was a need for a more detailed attendance check, but also arguing that the Headteacher did not encourage Group Tutors to view non-attendance as a high priority. Thirdly, the commitment to an overall school recognition of the need for pastoral care was called into question by the lack of time made available for the Group Tutors to carry out their task and indeed their apparent lack of interest.

Confirmation of the suspicion of truancy through the absence enquiry was also the province of the guidance teacher. Again the guidance staff felt this had become their responsibility due to dislike of the administrative duties by the Group Tutors. The Assistant Headteacher felt that the Group Tutor would enquire in only about 10% of cases.

This stage in the process was generally part of the initial identification of legitimate/illegitimate absence, and thereby a routinised task, but here, in Bayview, some variation was found. In practice, less than half (4) of the guidance staff used the absence enquiry routinely after the statutory 3 day period of absence, without first considering "what the child may be like".

For the other 7 staff, 3 would use the telephone instead, the reasons given for this being twofold. Firstly, the reply would be received quickly and secondly, the procedure would be "less embarrassing for the parents" suggesting that these staff are attempting to maximise the possibility of parental cooperation.

For the remaining 4 staff, a further decision was made about which

parents to contact either by enquiry or telephone based on the staff perception of which pupils would be likely to truant. The main factor guiding this decision was whether the child/family was already known to the guidance department. All these 7 staff were not keen to send an absence enquiry letter to the parents of pupils who had not previously tranted, as one put it :

*You're meant to use it after 3 days, but quite honestly if you used it after every three days, the postal cost for the Region would be astronomical.....if a kid's been absent, say for a week and they haven't got a history of absences, you give them the benefit of the doubt.*

Already the identification of the type of truant affected the actions

The implied criticisms in the enquiry were often avoided:

*because there's a little sting in the tail of the letter which can upset parents.*

The only parents to be dealt with in this way were those :

*known not to support the school system and had frequently been in trouble,*

the rest having no action taken in the meantime.

This use of the absence enquiry goes against the pastoral care of the guidance staff's dealings with some of the families, immediately isolating families for whom an unfriendly letter would be necessary. The inaction in other cases implies that those pupils who were seen to be "unlikely to truant" may fail to attend and remain undetected for a longer period, as well as being more likely to have their reasons believed. Only the minority (4) of the staff treated all suspected truants in the same way, and in their cases did so formally and automatically.

### Internal School Actions

Five of the staff at Bayview would have no discussion with the pupils at this stage, moving immediately to the Pink Card (discussed later). For the remainder of the staff, discussion of the non-attendance would take place for some, but not all pupils. These staff would still be selecting out those pupils less likely to be truanting. As expected all but one of the staff who selected those for whom to use an absence enquiry, decided on the basis of the same criteria which pupils to exclude from involvement in discussion.

Only pupils whose :

*background was such that they held the school in fairly high esteem and truancy wasn't a family problem*

would merit individual treatment as there was likely to be an explanation other than truancy for the behaviour. Established truants would move immediately to the Pink Card.

Knowledge of pupils in Bayview was in fact scanty on the part of the staff (the size of the school perhaps being a factor in this) and often this would be restricted to that which was in the pupil's file. This perhaps explains this use of previous family behaviour as an indication of the nature of the case.

The restriction of information was described by one of the staff :

*the guidance teacher can't say much, except whether they've been in, how their work is going.*

The staff would be more likely to know the academically able pupils than those who were truanting.

In those areas where information was necessary, then a pupil report

form could be sent round the class teachers to gauge behaviour and performance in class – again this would be largely academic information as the class teachers were seen to have little or no interest in pastoral care. This accords with the academic focus. Knowledge of home problems, necessary for any welfare approach was minimal and restricted to staff stereotyping of the types of family involved.

Having thus selected the families, however, the purpose of contact for these staff was not to counsel. Instead, this was seen to be part of the means of further discovering whether or not the absence was genuine or indeed truancy. There was no evidence of guidance staff at this stage assuming a problem-solving role.

Indeed "counselling" conditions were made difficult by the guidance organisation. The guidance rooms were also situated in the year areas (described earlier). These were small rooms which adjoined the large areas where the pupils would congregate during their breaks, and which at lunchtime became the pupils' dining areas. These areas were therefore usually populated by a large number of noisy pupils at these times, although during teaching periods throughout the day they were generally deserted. Within each year area, there was a separate room for boys and girls and their guidance teachers.

The consequence of the physical location of the room meant that if a pupil attempted to see a guidance teacher during a break, the volume of noise from the surrounding area would make any discussion, let alone "pastoral care" difficult.

There was rarely a guidance teacher there at these times. However,

each guidance teacher having an individual room in which to see pupils created the conditions of privacy seen to be necessary for personal counselling to take place, were the pupils to be able to go during periods.

In actual fact should a pupil wish to see his/her guidance teacher, he/she would have to fit this around the availability of the member of staff concerned. The guidance rooms were manned only at specific times. Although on occasion a guidance teacher might be in the room outwith the specified hours, this was the exception, and even when appointments were made to interview members of the guidance team during a period, there would be a proportion of the time spent waiting for the guidance teacher to arrive. These guidance rooms and year areas were spread about the school, perhaps helping to explain why the guidance teachers were not keen to spend extra time there.

The guidance staff spent their breaks either in departmental rooms or in the main staffroom in each case associating with other academic staff rather than the guidance team.

The only tasks to be systematically organised were those which had to be carried out at specific times, for example making appointments to see all the pupils to discuss their overall academic progress. For example, the course choice meetings and yearly progress discussions would be thus organised, and pupils would be taken out of class. During the entire period of observation, only one pupil was seen to approach her guidance teacher directly.

The guidance staff were, therefore, either assuming truancy and applying formal means of control (discussed later) or ensuring that those who remained in the process are those who do not come from "good" families.

It is clear that this stage would depend on discussion having previously taken place, and only 2 staff even mentioned changes as a possibility, and only for pupils with learning difficulties rather than as a solution to truancy pupils.

There was no recognition of other school factors as contributing to truancy and no evidence of any attempt to individualise timetables. Indeed the school seemed to be unwilling to adapt experiences to suit pupils, as one guidance teacher stated :

*we're still tied to a timetable and with the numbers (of pupils)  
we have to have a fairly rigid one*

and as another argued :

*you can talk about making lessons more interesting, but you  
can't spread that over an eight period day. They could love coming  
in for two periods , but if they do they're going to be caught for the  
other six.*

In fact, in Bayview it seemed :

*almost impossible - you just have to get them to realise that's  
the way life is.*

The identified academic concerns may also make it less likely that the staff will be involved in a great deal of activities other than the teaching role. Many criticisms of guidance in terms of the difficulty of reconciling the aims of the school and the demands of a system of pastoral care have been documented (Best et al, 1980; 1983) and indeed it seems the greatest attention is likely to be given to those most academically able. Indeed there was a recognition that the able and attending pupils were not disadvantaged by guidance activity :

*the needs of the majority take precedence, because after all you have to get on with the educational process,*

and as one said of truanting pupils :

*they occupy more time than they merit in terms of the time that the other kids lose.*

This view, that the needs of the organisation take precedence, and the identification of the organisational needs as primarily academic helps to explain the rigidity of approach. There is also a desire to protect the good pupils from the negative influences of this truanting minority. School difficulties were generally felt to be irrelevant and not a valid reason for failing to attend school. There was only one, very particular example of changes being attempted for a boy whose sister had been murdered a couple of years previously and who sometimes needed a safety net. For this child, provision would be made :

*he needs some days just to get out of the class, so he has an agreement with me that is known to the class teachers*

highlighting the severity of problems necessary before changes could be made. This was in accordance with the responses which were emerging that the guidance staff would detect the truancy, (some pupils being more obvious than others), then having done so they would make no attempt to deal with this themselves, either through discussion or changes.

Similarly, the Irregular Attendance Card was used only for a small number of pupils and only occasionally. The purpose of this in most cases, was not at their own instigation, but following a request from the parent or EWO. The guidance teachers were only the administrative machinery for carrying out the tasks.

Whatever the pastoral functions of the guidance department they did not seem to relate to truancy, which at Bayview did not number amongst the guidance tasks.

### Formal External Measures

The division of parents would be made by their degree of accordance with school values and how far they claimed to try. Critical, unsupportive parents were seen to be condoning truancy. Others would be seen to be ineffectual if truancy persisted. The aim was to distinguish between cases where parents were to blame and where pupils were to blame. Unsupportive parents would be punished. Supportive parents would have their children (in the staff view), punished.

The Pink Card was the first response for 5 staff following an unsatisfactory response to their absence enquiry, with no other measures attempted. For the remainder, it was the first response for any previous truant or unsupportive family, and the first response to established truancy even in "good" families. In fact, once confirmed truancy of any kind would immediately be dealt with in this way by all the staff, this being the standardised response to all truants. It might take staff longer to confirm the truancy for pupils from supportive homes, but ultimately, this would be the course taken.

For all the staff, the main purpose of the Pink Card was to point out to the parents the legal position that :

*they (the pupil) should be at school. It really is your (the parent) responsibility.*

This seemed to be the main thrust of Bayview's approach - at each stage to enforce the legal process as it pertained to the situation. The emphasis was



on the intentionality of the behaviour. By this stage if any of the good families had been established as truanting, they would be recategorised in one of two ways, as either unsupportive or "ineffectual" along with the others. Most were seen to be unsupportive :

*I don't think that they (the EWOs) should be taken in by any old excuse, because that's what they will be offered in most cases.*

For the parent of an established truant, therefore, the EWO should be (in the view of the guidance staff) firm and cynical. All but one of the staff did also mention, however, that the approach should be different should it become apparent that the parent was doing all they could to return the child to school, but was having no success. A supportive approach to this parent would be seen to be appropriate and the perception of the subsequent action might be changed. The way the staff felt that the EWO should attempt the division into types was in the same way as a member of the guidance team :

*In the same varied way that the guidance teacher would approach it. If he had been at that door for the last 15 years for all the lady's previous 9 children, and had had the same old stuff, well he's going to be a wee bit cynical about it, but if he comes along and finds a situation where the husband has just left home and there's a granny staying with them who's just had a heart attack and one or two things like that, there's a bit of compassion needed there.*

Just, therefore, as these factors were taken by the guidance staff to identify genuine non-attenders, they also felt that the EWO should adopt the same criteria to identify genuine problems. Although this was seen to require a sympathetic approach, in any but short term crises there was an implied criticism of the parents either with reference to their circumstances or their children being outwith their control, and their giving "sob stories". As one put it :

*the more difficult home background.....I still think they get away with it more readily than perhaps the kid from the home where the parents are really on top of the situation.*

Staff contact with the EWO in Bayview did not seem to follow any definite pattern, many of the staff mentioning that it depended on whether or not they were free, although some mentioned obtaining from and sharing some information with the EWO, who would make herself available for consultation.

This approach highlights the emphasis on law enforcement. All parents must return the pupils to school, and this task was the province of agencies other than the school.

The Pink Cards examined, although few, showed several features also indicative of the school's response. It was clear that this would often be the first action to be taken following the use of the absence enquiry. Of the twelve examined, 11 were a request to deal with a suspicion of truancy. The other was the request for the EWO to help with the provision of footwear, as the parent had written to say that this was the reason for the non-attendance. Some of the teachers in Bayview were also willing to comment on their perceptions of the causes of the truancy on these cards, and generally these views centred on the notion that the parents were at fault, for example :

*letter sent to the parents reminding them of attendance - no improvement,*

suggesting that the parents had made no attempt to alter the situation and :

*required to be reminded of their responsibility.*

Interestingly, the EWO's comments, however, did not suggest a simple acceptance of the school's view of the necessary steps to take and the causes of the behaviour. In the majority of cases, a reason for the absence was forthcoming and was noted, often with the parent requesting an attendance sheet and apparently wishing to cooperate. In only three cases were the parents warned.

The staff viewed their role in the process as one of detection and referral and detachment seeing the necessary progression through the appropriate legal channels. The majority of staff at Bayview would not attend the School Attendance Committee, although one was actually a committee member through the school council and three others would go where possible. The rest preferred to leave it to the EWO because they (as guidance teachers) have enough to do.

The main purpose of the action for most of the staff was punitive, and only two even acknowledged a problem-solving function, tending to "blame" the parents either for their deliberate behaviour or for the lack of ability to deal with their children. These were the distinctions they expected the SAC to make. Several described the action taken as a "short, sharp shock" to "bring home the seriousness of it", with the notion of parental responsibility extensively mentioned, the perceived laxity of the parents providing the main reason for referral. The view was of a legal process with an emphasis on "statutory duties" and :

*a corrective influence.....it's one of the sanctions we have.*

The dominant assumption was that :

*the parents having got to that stage are obviously not really interested in the problem or the child's outwith their control*

the twofold distinction made earlier. Always the notion of parents and/or pupils being able to end the truancy with sufficient commitment .

The reports to the School Attendance Committee emphasised the effects on the pupil in terms of their academic work. The twofold division between parents was apparent. Where they were seen to be trying to help (i.e. when they outwardly accepted the values of the school), if the truancy persisted they were labelled ineffectual, and where they were not trying, they would be seen to cover absence with notes. Both groups were discussed with a degree of distaste.

There was no discussion of any problems in these reports, reflecting partly the lack of involvement by the guidance staff and partly the lack of previous contact which would have provided this information. The only complaints the staff had about the Attendance Committee were that it did not "bite hard enough".

For many of the staff, knowledge of the function of the Procurator Fiscal was at best sketchy, with one member of staff feeling the purpose was to prosecute the child. They did, however, have clear views of those for whom this was the appropriate means, the nature of action being :

*the final deterrent you've got.*

All the staff felt that they :

*have to have an element of punishment when it comes to the crunch*

as the parents think they are beating the system. This idea that the parents

were directly challenging the authority of the school led to the necessity of this :

*punitive thing.....it's like anything else.....the parent is breaking the law.....and when it becomes obvious that the parent is quite deliberate about it, then I certainly think it's got to be punitive.*

The use of the Reporter, despite the lack of emphasis on welfare measures was felt to be necessary for the ineffectual parent, who was assumed to be in need of some paternalistic support to deal with their difficult and often offending children.

The emphasis on pupils committing offences was stressed by most staff, with shoplifting, housebreaking and glue sniffing mentioned as frequent examples. The response would then be to view the Reporter as the appropriate legal channel to deal with this in order to in many cases remove them from home, the implication being that if the parents had been able to deal with the behaviour, then a residential placement would both discipline the pupils and secure their education.

There was also a related desire to protect the school from this particularly, there was a concern that :

*they congregate in the bandit machine area and they cause the school problems.*

The staff referral elsewhere may thus be indicative of the need to detach and distance these pupils' association with Bayview.

The feeling that the type of pupil who would truant was also associated with a type of background and contempt for authority was then taken further in the expression of the staff fear that such pupils may be finding a way into the school via the parents' charter. Two of the guidance

staff expressly mentioned the problem of gaining from Oakbank :

*we have taken in so many from the Oakbank area with the parents' charter*

the worry for the staff being the type of family this involved :

*we've got the parents' charter working in reverse, we're getting kids moving school not because they prefer the school but because they've been flung out of the last school.*

With most of the parents sharing the values of the school and encouraging their children in those matters both school and pupils held to be important, the staff felt there was a good relationship with the community. This emphasises the general perception of Bayview as a school with a good reputation. Indeed Bayview attracted amongst the highest numbers of placing requests in the city and was concerned to preserve that reputation and :

*the public expect us primarily to educate in the sense that we stand in front of the blackboard, we give them certain items of information, they pass or don't pass national exams.*

Consequently, those parents and pupils who did not see these factors as important were regarded as going against the acceptable pattern of behaviour.

This was also reflected in the few hearing reports which were available for examination in the school containing reference to the families where pupils were defiant, offending or both, reflecting in those factors emphasised the theoretical views of the staff. In all cases for these ineffectual parents, the staff would detail what the parents had attempted, such as :

*rings to see if she's in school - mother very concerned*

and pupils who were :

*defying authority at home*

and :

*very self-willed - pays scant regard to parents and fails to appreciate the seriousness of actions.*

Finally, the staff also recognised that there were some cases where the truancy could be the fault of both parent and pupil (the parent condoning the truancy, the pupil offending), and in these cases the parent would be seen to require a referral to the Procurator Fiscal and the child to the Reporter.

## THE SCHOOLS : AN OVERVIEW

Without repeating the findings of the previous chapters, the evidence from the schools already begins, before examining the later agencies, to point to the operation of differing conceptions of, and responses to, truancy. The methods of dealing with truanting pupils correspondingly differ and clearly relate to the assumptions about truancy being made. They do not, however, always relate to the stated intentions.

Such differences in approach support the initial assertion that the conflicting views of school and deviance would be reflected in such differing actions, bearing out the situation which Reid (1986) describes, whereby :

*schools vary considerably in the type of responses they make to their pupils.....and the speed at which punitive sanctions replace or are operated instead of welfare oriented ones. Schools, therefore, tend to be idiosyncratic in their responses to pupils' needs dependent on their philosophy and assessment of individual situations.*

The differences relate to the relative importance of welfare and punishment and the concerns of the school in relation to overall ethos and response to offending. This conflict has also been expressed in relation to the education system :

*Formal sanctions for dealing with both absentees and disruptees are marked by conflicts of interest between caring and punitive concerns. (Reid 1986)*

The emergent situation parallels that which Cohen describes in relation to penal sanctions whereby explanations of action are :

*produced to describe, explain, justify, rationalise, condone, apologise for, criticise, theorise about or otherwise interpret things which have been done, are being done or will be done by others. All these words might bear only the most oblique relationship to what is*



*actually happening. (Cohen 1983)*

However, perhaps it should be borne in mind as the evidence from the subsequent agencies is presented that :

*these people should never forget that actions and decisions which they take can directly or indirectly affect the quality of human lives. (Reid 1985)*

The coexistence of these differing responses and justifications provides a questionable basis for dealing with pupils who fail to attend school. These points will be covered more fully in the conclusion. First, it is necessary to examine the other bodies to whom pupils may be referred.

## CHAPTER 8

## SCHOOL ATTENDANCE COMMITTEES

As seen from the outline in Chapter 2, the purpose of the School Attendance Committee is to deal with the parents, with, as seen, certain procedural conditions to be followed. Again, the practical operation of these bodies will be examined, both in terms of their organisation and the use and purpose of the various disposals made available to them.

In examination, it was discovered that the primary task for three of the four attendance committees (Oakbank, Birchwood and Ashdale) was one of control. This applied to both pupils and parents who were being sanctioned and threatened, and when this failed, punished. There was little or no attempt to isolate or to deal with any problems. This approach could only be seen in Bayview, where families were encouraged to discuss their difficulties with this more welfare-oriented committee.

**Practical Organisation and Procedures**

All four schools had committees which met, as the guidelines stipulate, away from the school premises in a variety of settings. Oakbank used a small medical room in a primary school, Ashdale a large hall in a local community centre, Birchwood either a dentist's room or classroom in a local primary school and Bayview a music room in a primary school.

**Members**

All schools had difficulty in recruiting Attendance Committee members, and throughout the research the same groups were repeatedly seen.

Oakbank : The chair was shared by two members (both teachers) who tended to control the discussion and ask the majority of questions. These two

members dominated each meeting and were joined by one of two other regular committee members. Generally, the third participant acquiesced with their view. Also present were the clerk to the committee (an EWO from outwith the area) and the pupil's own EWO. The clerk frequently participated in the meetings (in three cases suggesting the course of action to the committee) and directly questioning the family in two others. The pupil's own EWO provided background and comment when requested.

Ashdale : The chair here was held by one of the parents who took the leading role in the proceedings. This committee regularly had four members (none of which were school staff), but in practice, only two participated in the discussion. One said :

*there's the two of us, and the others just sit there, not paying the least bit attention.*

The clerk to the committee was the EWO for the area, and he confined his role at the meeting to an advisory/procedural one, giving further details of cases prior to the start of the meeting (in his capacity as the pupil's EWO). The pupil's guidance teacher was also present in every case.

Birchwood : This committee was composed of one teacher and one guidance teacher from the school, and one new member. One of the teachers was in the chair, and both she and the guidance teacher dominated the discussion. As with Ashdale, the clerk to the committee was also the EWO for the area, but unlike Ashdale, he actively participated to a substantial extent. In three cases, he suggested to the committee prior to their consideration of a case what the eventual disposal should be! In six cases he actively joined in questioning both pupils and parents, to the extent that one member remarked at interview :

*The clerk to the committee often tends to sway the day. I think once or twice we've felt that we've done what he wanted rather than what we felt was right.*

The EWO also frequently passed comments such as the following to the pupils :

*if you go the Reporter, the panel might decide to put you to a school where you'll have to stay, so you'd better try.*

Bayview : As with Ashdale, the chairperson was a parent, and the committee was generally composed of parents. Although one of the school guidance team was also a member, he was not seen during observation, refusing to participate due to the teachers' industrial action at the time. At this committee, all the members present participated fully, and the final decision drew on the views of all the parties present. The clerk came from outwith the area, again actively questioning the family in four cases and suggesting what to do in six. Members here, however, tended to turn to the pupils' own EWOs for information, being less influenced by the opinions of the clerk and often challenging his view. Even in terms of participation, therefore, Bayview aimed to involve all present in a full exchange.

Thus it can be seen that two committees, Oakbank and Birchwood were dominated by teaching staff, Ashdale and Bayview by parents. In all but Bayview, the decision was made by the two most vocal members, with heavy influence from the clerk at Birchwood and to a lesser extent in Oakbank.

In addition to the participants described, in almost all cases the parents were present. (In the eight cases where parents were not present, six reached decisions in their absence and two preferred to continue for their appearance - this will be discussed later). All the committee members also

expressed a preference for the attendance of the pupils (directing much of the questioning to them as will become clear), and again in only eight cases were pupils not present. Five of these were continued, with the parents expressly requested to bring the pupils to the subsequent meetings.

Finally, only two parents made use of the option to bring another person with them (one brought the child's sister, the other his own sister in law).

### **The Conduct of the Meetings**

Some procedural guidelines also cover the conduct of the meetings, and in all cases, the first stage in consideration of a case was a prior discussion of the family by the committee members. It was possible in each school to discern the factors being emphasised repeatedly at this stage. All schools gathered and examined this reported information at the outset, although the subsequent use to which they put it would differ.

**Oakbank :** The emphasis was on whether or not the child had been to a previous attendance Committee, any reasons which had been given and any specific problems the child might have. The guidance teacher present provided details of school behaviour, the EWO of the home situation.

**Ashdale :** Previous behaviour was again important (for the pupil and other members of the family) and the home circumstances were outlined by the EWO. The guidance teacher provided information about previous contact/action and the behaviour of the pupil, giving a fairly detailed picture of the family.

**Birchwood :** Discussion here was brief prior to meetings. The reports were read, the EWO provided his impression of the family and the guidance

teacher discussed any previous contact.

Bayview : At this committee, prior to the family's entrance, the discussion was slightly different, as whereas the other committees tended to look at the circumstances, the members here tried to relate these more closely to the truancy, and to use the background to explain the behaviour. Any specific problems which were apparent would be isolated, and there was lengthy questioning of the EWO about specific aspects of the case.

The next stage in the process was the entrance of the family, and at this stage the predominant concern of the committee members at Oakbank, Ashdale and Birchwood of achieving conformity and control (and school attendance) becomes clearer. Although it would be impossible to cover every question asked of every family, common patterns could be identified.

Oakbank : The initial questions were directed at the parent in every case, s/he being invited to offer an explanation where possible. The pattern which followed depended on the parental response, and broadly where the parent had been aware of the truancy, the assumption was made that the entire family was uncooperative and the parents ineffectual or unwilling to alter the behaviour. Attention focussed immediately on the pupil. Where the parent claimed to have been unaware of the truancy, the committee members talked generally of the difficulties caused by the pupil's lack of attendance.

Following this, the meetings concentrated on questioning the pupils, the response of the committee dependent on the reaction of the pupil.

In all cases, the pupil was first asked for the reasons for the non-attendance, and any pupil who reacted defiantly or appeared unconcerned was immediately told of the "consequences" of the behaviour. The following

case provides a clear example of this, involving two brothers and their mother

Chairperson : So you admit you've been kipping then?  
 Boys : Aye  
 Chairperson : How do you feel about it?  
 Boys : Shrug  
 Chairperson : Does being here bother you?  
 Boys : No  
 Member : Perhaps we should tell them about the  
                   things that can happen then.

At this stage, the options of the committee were related to the boys, beginning with the Procurator Fiscal, presented in terms of their mother going to court, being fined or sent to prison. The Reporter and the Attendance Order were then mentioned (as punishments) and the pupils told that they should now be worried. Having apparently gained the attention of the pupils, the committee then proceeded to deal with the case in the same manner as for those who had co-operated from the start.

Pupils who did offer a reason generally claimed to dislike an aspect of school. The committee was keen to point out that :

*everybody has to do things they don't like*

as well as the advantages of school. Several factors recurred : the pupil would be asked about jobs - the importance of references and qualifications was pointed out. The pupil would then be asked about activities whilst truanting, and the relative interest of the school pointed out. For girls, the moral danger would be alluded to. The pupils would be told of the trouble they could get into, and a general discussion of school would ensue until parent and pupil gave assurances of future attendance. They would then be asked to leave.

Throughout the discussion, home and family problems were not

introduced by the committee (rendering fairly meaningless the collection of information), preferring to concentrate on the value of schooling and the error of the pupils' ways. Where a family mentioned problems, this did not prompt further discussion, but was merely taken as an indication of parental co-operation, making the task of persuasion easier.

At Oakbank, in all but three cases, the parents were then asked to leave while the cases were considered. The discussion centred on the position of the parent, and whether they were interested in (i.e. supported) the school. Also considered was the behaviour in the school of the pupil. The members then assessed, on the basis of the attitude of the family, whether they felt the non-attendance was likely to continue. The options available were considered in the light of these factors, and the specific types of decision will be discussed later.

The family was then informed of the decision by the chairperson, and advised about conduct, for example :

Chairperson : We'll be keeping a close watch on you in the future. It's only fair to give you a chance. You should try and help yourself a bit more and we'll keep you on a blue sheet

or

Chairperson : You must prove to us that you can do it. Oakbank has a lot to offer and you should try and make the most of it instead of getting into trouble.

In those cases where the parent was not asked to withdraw, the decision had been reached before the family entered the meeting.

The concern of these committee members with conformity was



further apparent at interview, the members seeing their purpose as one of returning the pupils to school, whilst spelling out to the family the importance of attendance. The technique was well-rehearsed, particularly the use of the clerk in each case to read to the family the possible disposals available to the meeting. The main view of the pupils appearing was that they must understand :

*the problems of telling lies and letting parents down*

and the parents had to have the seriousness of the behaviour formally pointed out to them.

Ashdale : Here, the focus of the discussion was immediately on the pupil, showing him/her the relevant Pink Card and demanding explanation. Again the pupil's reaction was crucial. Uncooperative pupils were told what could happen to the parents (in terms only of referral to the Procurator Fiscal, presented as the likeliest course of action). Having done this, all pupils would then be dealt with in the same manner.

Despite the large volume of information gathered prior to the meeting, (in some cases concerning drink problems, drug problems, marital difficulties and involvement in serious crime), the pupil would be asked about school, about the course he/she was following and any school problems he/she was having. The committee then pointed to the waste of education, the importance of references and the reduction in job prospects through failure to attend. The discussion of "what can happen" then took place for all pupils (some for the second time), and assurances of future conduct were sought.

Again any "problems" were ignored in discussion, the main emphasis

being on the need to return the pupil to school. Committee members stated that they were, through the above discussion, trying to establish whether parents/pupils were concerned about the non-attendance, to elicit the cause and to "give them a fright". The pupil's recent behaviour and assessed likelihood of return were then assessed in the members' discussion. In addition, the likely response of other agencies was considered. Frequently when a referral to the Procurator Fiscal or the Reporter was suggested, the members debated whether or not there was any likelihood of action being taken.

Following the decision, the procedure would be explained to the family, the reinforcement of the opinion that :

*it would be in your interests to get yourself back to school between now and then and not just nip off when you feel like it.*

In three cases in Ashdale, the family was not invited to leave while the decision was reached, as it had been made previously, but two of these pupils were May leavers for whom the committee felt that they had no option but to desert the cases and the third had achieved perfect attendance since being continued.

Birchwood : Here, as with Oakbank, the parent was briefly addressed (the chairperson explaining the purpose of the meeting to him/her) and asked to provide a reason for the non-attendance. The main focus, however, as with the previous two, was the pupil, who was asked for the reason, and prompted with questions about whether there was anything unpleasant at school, with teachers, schoolwork or friends. Generally pupils then supplied a school-based reason, and the committee members attempted to point out the

benefits of a return to school in the same manner as the other committees. The notion that unpleasant tasks must be tolerated was frequently repeated, the effect on employment and the dangers of crime also mentioned.

The committee then attempted to discover an aspect of the school which the pupil enjoyed, and stressed this as a reason to return.

In all cases the consequences were outlined before moving on to emphasise the need for future attendance and behaviour. Any lack of co-operation was dealt with by a further return to the sanctions available. The following provides an example. Here the committee were trying to establish the boy's truancy :

Guidance T : Have you been in school today?  
 Boy : Yes  
 G.T. : All day?  
 Boy : Yes  
 G.T. : You're a liar. (To mother - I'm  
 sorry I have to say that, but I know  
 for a fact he wasn't in school). Now  
 I'll ask again. Were you in school.  
 Boy : No  
 G.T. : Do you know how serious this is and what  
 can happen to your mum?

The clerk then proceeded to read out the formal disposals available.

When the parents/pupil had been asked to wait outside, the discussion then covered those areas seen to be uppermost in the concerns of the members throughout the meeting, the parent's attitude and behaviour (all the committees seemed to feel this could be assessed) the child's attitude and attendance and the options available. When the family returned, the decision was communicated and encouragement given to attend. Those cases (3) where the decision was apparently made in the presence of the family were continued cases which were deserted, and the decision had been taken prior

to the meeting.

Birchwood Attendance Committee members stated that their main task was to discover whether or not a parent was making sufficient effort to return the pupil. Interestingly, the chosen means of doing this was through questioning the pupil about school, perhaps already assuming that the parent would be condoning the behaviour.

The similarities between these committees are clear – the focus of attention was on the pupil, the emphasis was on the pupil's return to school (through coercion and persuasion) and the verbal acceptance of the need and value of school attendance.

Bayview : The lack of reproach and threat at Bayview was apparent in each of the cases observed here. As in the other schools, members in Bayview began the meeting in possession of considerable information. In contrast to the other committees, this provided the basis for the discussion.

At the outset the pupil and parent were reassured about the meeting, the chairperson stating that :

*we're here because of ..... 's attendance, to try and sort out any problems he/she might be having.*

The pupil would then be asked about the reasons for the poor attendance, and the procedure from this point appeared to vary according to the reason given rather than the attitude of the pupil. From then on the discussion varied by circumstances.

If the reason given by the pupil was school-based, the committee would try to identify someone in the school who would be willing to help and to whom the pupil felt he/she could talk. Often the guidance teacher was

suggested as a helpful contact (perhaps because of the lack of previous contact and action which Chapter 7 clearly showed would have preceded referral in Bayview). If the problem was in the home, the committee would discuss possible ways of dealing with this.

As well as directly tackling such problems, the committee would also ask pupils about future jobs, the difference from the other committees being one of approach. Positive comments in school reports were frequently read out to reinforce the possibilities for the pupils. Even pupils whose behaviour in other committees would have been assessed as unco-operative were dealt with in this way. In none of the cases were the possible courses of action read to the family, and the participation of both pupils and parents was noticeably greater at these meetings.

The discussion by members with the parents outside followed several steps. The first part of this concerned the reasons offered by the family for the non-attendance. Following this, the committee related the reason given to a discussion of the most appropriate course of action in order to solve any problem that was discovered. The family situation was discussed in detail and the views of the EWO sought as to the most appropriate solution.

When the decision was communicated to the parent, a full explanation of the ensuing procedure (if there were to be any) was given, until it was clear that the parent understood. The Chairperson also explained why the decision had been reached, always presenting this in terms of a solution to the presenting problem. Those cases in which the family were not requested to leave were again either continued cases or May leavers, the cases deserted.

The concerns in Bayview were repeated by the committee members

at interview, where they suggested that their questions were intended to discover the family situation, the aspects of school the pupil did not like, and most important, the reasons for the truancy. The main purpose of the committee was to return the pupil to school (as in all the committees), but to return the pupil to school happily.

Bayview, therefore, was prepared to make a real attempt to address the underlying cause of the behaviour, to act as an intermediate body to discover the reasons for the truancy and make the appropriate referral.

Despite these differences in approach, the committee members from all the schools shared the view that compulsory school attendance was valuable and beneficial. All felt they were, in their own way, serving the child's best interests by attempting to achieve this. However, members at Oakbank, Ashdale and Birchwood identified school weaknesses in discipline at interview and felt that :

*the committee could do with more strength behind its elbow*

whereas in Bayview all the members mentioned that they felt the disadvantaged pupil did not receive enough attention in the school. (This accords with the findings in Chapter 7 relating to the means of dealing with problems in Bayview.

Whether in fact the differences in views and operation made any real difference to the disposals will be clearer in an examination of these.

### **The Disposals**

School Attendance Committees have six options available as follows :

1. To continue the case for up to a maximum of six weeks, in which

case they may request (a) a medical report, from the School Medical Service (b) a psychological report from Child Guidance or (c) both types of report. It was not a condition, however, of continued cases that a further report be sought.

2. To make an Attendance Order

3. To refer the child to the Reporter

4. To advise the Procurator Fiscal that prosecution of the parent may be called for

5. To refer the child to the Reporter and advise the Procurator Fiscal

6. To desert the case.

In the first instance, a breakdown of the actual disposals observed may be useful, before considering the means of reaching the decisions.

#### DISPOSALS AT 4 A.C.s DURING OBSERVATION

Disposal	Ob	Ad	Bw	Bv	Tot
Continue :					
Medical Report	0	0	1	0	1
Child Guidance Report	0	0	0	4	4
Appearance of Parent	0	0	0	1	1
Improvement	8	2	4	0	14
Attendance Order	2	3	1	0	6
Reporter	2	2	1	2	7
Procurator Fiscal	0	1	0	0	1
Reporter & P.F.	0	0	0	1	1
Desert	2	4	2	4	12
	14	12	9	12	47

The reasons given for the use of these must now be considered.

### Continued Cases

These, as can be seen from the table, formed almost half of all disposals observed, and of these, 75% were continued in order to give the pupil a chance to improve and resume full time attendance. This accords with the nature and organisation of the meetings at Oakbank, Ashdale and Birchwood, where the purpose and conduct revolved around the assumption that the School Attendance Committee primarily provided the threat of further action, which should in itself be sufficient to return the pupils. This notion of allowing pupils to prove they could conform implies a view of the truancy as soluble through the effort of parent and pupil alone. One member at Oakbank suggested that provided the family gave the appropriate assurances, this would always be the first disposal used. The test would measure the effort :

*the most common reason for continuing is to.....see if they  
can cope with getting the child back to school in that period.*

*(Birchwood)*

The members then hoped that the stern warning of the committee would produce the desired changes. They also, in their actions failed to acknowledge any deeper reason for truancy and attempted no remedial action. The imposition of this disposal was always backed up with further warning :

Chairperson : You must make sure you're in every  
day and then come back to another  
meeting. If it's perfect, you'll be  
O.K. If not, there are lots of things  
we can do.

*(Ashdale)*



Many committee members complained that they would like to use this disposal for longer periods, to maintain the threat. The fact that at the end of this period a decision to desert or a further disposal must be made was seen to be a major flaw in the resources available. Ashdale gave an example of the problem :

*You can only have a person on a six week continuance, and the parents could play that system to suit themselves. We've been bogged down with people who said they've not had their papers. When they eventually turn up, it's on the second session, it's got to count as part of the six weeks and you lose three weeks. So all you do is not answer the door to the postman. The holidays interfere as well.*

As can be seen from the table, however, the use of this disposal was markedly different in Bayview, where the use of continuation in all five cases was for a specific reason relating to the individual pupil's circumstances. One of these cases was continued for the appearance of the parent, the remaining four for Child Guidance reports. In these cases, the committee had some knowledge of underlying problems, but felt they had insufficient information on which to base a subsequent referral. In fact two of these cases concerned poor behaviour in school and the failure to give an adequate explanation of the truancy, which would have been interpreted in the other schools as indicating a lack of co-operation.

In the other two cases, the committee, as well as requiring more information, felt that the pupils would benefit from psychological help. The pupils were brother and sister and the boy had a sexual problem which was causing the girl embarrassment at school. The referral had thus the twofold purpose of provision of information and provision of help. In these referrals, the committee was unconcerned about the presenting behaviour of the pupils

and parents, but trying to deal with the underlying problems.

The only other school seen to use this option was Birchwood, but in this case it was to provide evidence which could be used in prosecution. This particular case was continued for a medical report, as the boy concerned had been consistently absent, and a series of illnesses had been offered as reasons. The EWO had telephoned the boy's doctor who had said there was no medical reason why the boy should not have normal attendance. During discussion, however, the EWO pointed out that a verbal report from the doctor would not be considered sufficient evidence in a further referral, and a statutory examination would be needed. The six week period was used for this purpose.

#### **Attendance Order**

This is the other disposal available to the Attendance Committee which relies on the deterrence of the experience of the meeting and the threat of further action to return pupils to school. The use of this was observed in Oakbank, Ashdale and Birchwood. Once an attendance order is made, when the non-attendance recurs, the case is sent directly to the Procurator Fiscal by the EWO.

Although this disposal is applied to the parent, in both Oakbank and Birchwood the pupil's attitude was the reason for its use (measured apparently by lack of communication in the meeting), leaving doubt with the committee members about the likelihood of a return. All six cases given attendance orders had already been continued for the six week period, and the attendance had shown improvement, but the feeling was that this was merely to con the committee by improving for that period.

In the cases where the child's attitude was given as the explanation, it was based on the notion that the child had not been sufficiently vocal/committed to the desire to return to school and accept the benefits of this. It was explained at Birchwood as follows :

Chairperson : Unfortunately after six weeks we've got to make a decision, but we feel we need to keep an eye on the attendance, so we've got to use an attendance order.

Guidance T : I wondered about leaving him, but if we did that it would be too much delay getting him back if it happened again.

In the three cases at Ashdale, parental attitude was the crucial factor, measured by their lack of attendance at the meeting (although the pupils' attendance had improved). The apparent lack of interest gave cause for concern and implied to the members a willingness to condone the truancy. The parents had to be shown that failure to respond would not be ignored. The view taken in all cases was again that sufficient effort would provide a return, making the order :

*like a threat really*

when members are :

*not 100% sure it should be let go.*

### **Referral to the Reporter**

All the schools used this disposal, although in a minority of cases. Again all had previously been continued, but all had failed to return to regular attendance. The decision was made in Oakbank, Ashdale and Birchwood on the basis of the attitude of the pupil. The pupils were either not sufficiently

concerned or unruly, the meetings followed the isolated course of reprimand and the pupils failed to provide the required assurances. The Reporter was seen to be an unpleasant sanction for the pupils and the referral made on the basis of this.

An example from Ashdale highlights the nature of the action. In this case, there were problematic home circumstances, with the family involved in drugs and at the centre of a murder case. The committee agreed that the boy should be dealt with rather than the parent and the approach initially was one of school discussion. However, during the discussion, the schoolhouse (Ashdale's small unit, described in Chapter 5) was mentioned as a possibility and the boy said that he would like to go there as he had a friend in there. At this point the committee decided he was deliberately behaving badly in order to secure a place in the schoolhouse and the tone of the meeting changed. The severity of the situation was pointed out, the Procurator Fiscal threatened and the home problems ignored. In discussion, the members agreed it was the pupil who should be shown that he could not behave like this, and the Reporter should be used.

In another Ashdale case, the following ensued in response to the invitation to hear a reading of the disposals :

Boy : Yes, I am worried about my mum, but  
I don't want to know what can happen  
to us.

Chairperson : I've had enough of this cheek

Boy : I'm not being cheeky, I'm just  
answering the questions

Chairperson : I don't like your tone

Again in the subsequent discussion, concern was expressed about the boy's

attitude, and as one put it :

*The Reporter would give him more of a fright because he's not worried by us.*

The Reporter in these cases was used carrying the same threat as had previous action, where the pupil was felt to be to blame, and

*where the child says I'm not going back and I don't care what you do.*

*(Oakbank)*

Many of the committee members also assumed that these pupils would be involved in :

*illegal doings of some kind*

although :

*if they've got no other offences, most of the cases are admonished*

*(Ashdale)*

At Bayview, in common with the above cases, the pupils had continuing poor attendance. However, the decision to refer to the Reporter was not based on the pupil's behaviour – indeed the pupils were not present at the hearings in these cases. In one of the cases, a Child Guidance report had isolated some problems the boy was having, and the committee felt further referral to be necessary. In the second, the girl involved was felt to be sexually at risk. The EWO had pointed out that the girl was spending her days on what was described as a house of ill-repute, being harboured by a woman who drank heavily. For the child's welfare to be protected, referral to the

Reporter was seen to be necessary.

At interview, the following reasons for the use of the Reporter at Bayview were given :

*that (the referral) is when we feel the child is at risk, and often you read between the lines and hear there are huge problems at home and you feel the child is really in need of specialised care.*

*(Bayview)*

The purpose was to :

*try and generally patch things up and get everybody pulling together, by showing him (the pupil) that although there's a lot of friction, there's also a lot of people care enough to come and listen.*

*(Bayview)*

#### **The Procurator Fiscal**

In the one case where the use of this disposal was observed, the attitude of the parent prompted the decision. The family had a history of truancy and the mother complained vociferously about some of the school staff. This was taken to indicate condoning the truancy and failing to cooperate :

Mother : As far as I know there's no truancy  
and when they're off it's because  
there's something wrong.

Chairperson : There's an awful lot of absence

Mother : They're ill a lot and I won't send  
my kids to school when they're not well

She then went on to criticise the school :

Mother : The school should have got in touch  
with me if they had anything to ask  
about their attendance

and the staff :

Mother : I'll tell you what's wrong with that

school. Some of the teachers are terrible and there's two of them in this room.

(Guidance teachers) That one (points) questions kids in front of their friends why they've not been. He asks them if their mother or father keeps them off school.

At the conclusion of the meeting, she gave no assurances of future attendance:

Mother : Anyway there's nothing wrong with my kids being off. I was surprised to be up here for him, because he's not had as many days off as some of the others. It's not my fault if the kids have been off a lot

The members' discussion centred on the mother colluding with the pupils and encouraging them to stay off school. The attitude the members felt was being displayed was taken to indicate the absence of the desired effort. This was one of the few cases where any notion of a discernable parental attitude was apparent, focussing on this because the pupil was not present and the mother particularly vocal.

All the other schools (Oakbank, Birchwood and Bayview) felt the Procurator Fiscal would only be used where the parent would :

*point blank refuse to cooperate in any way.*

*(Oakbank)*

This would, by them too, be taken to indicate playing the system and would be the last resort. The preference in the schools was not to use this, relying at least in Oakbank, Ashdale and Birchwood on :

*using the Procurator Fiscal as a threat, not because I want them to lose money, it's to try and make them realise.*

(Ashdale)

As seen, the threat of action against parents was generally directed at the pupils in an attempt to gain compliance. Bayview members preferred to describe the necessity of action as being to protect the pupils from suffering as a result of the deliberate actions of their parents.

Both Oakbank and Ashdale committees complained, however, that when a case was sent to the Procurator Fiscal, too often these resulted in dismissal, calling for a strengthening of the likelihood of prosecution, as :

*when he takes no action or when he admonishes them, it reinforces their ideas.*

#### **The Reporter and the Procurator Fiscal**

This double disposal was also used in only one case, in Bayview, and this is best understood in terms of the reasons for the use of each of the separate agencies.

The case centred on a girl whose father persistently offered medical reasons for her absence, despite the fact that the girl's G.P. had told the EWO that there was no medical reason why she should not be in school. When confronted with this, the father stated that it was up to him and not the doctor to decide, and that he would change the family G.P. He also said that the Attendance Committee could prosecute if they wanted.

The referral of the father to the Procurator Fiscal was seen as a possible means of protecting the girl from the behaviour of the parent. The daughter's welfare also provided the grounds for her referral to the Reporter.

The committee reached this conclusion because the girl had admitted to being happier when she was at school. The problems at home contributing



to her lack of attendance centring on her relationship with her parents were seen to require the input of specialist help and to necessitate consideration by the Reporter.

In actual fact this measure was very rarely used in any of the schools, but the criteria which would guide the decision related to the existence of all the criteria for referral to each of the Reporter and Procurator Fiscal (described in the previous sections).

### **Desert**

This was the second most common disposal (12/47). Two main types of case were deserted. Firstly, the most obvious situation was where the pupil's case had been continued, the attendance had improved and the committee felt this would continue (in the absence of the already-discussed conditions for further action)

The second and larger group of cases deserted consisted of May leavers, perhaps reflecting the stage in the school year in which the observation took place. The schools appeared to be referring the worst cases of S4 truancy to the committees to deter others (younger siblings and other pupils) rather than as a means of encouraging the pupils themselves. Oakbank, Ashdale and Birchwood accepted this as a legitimate function of the committee. Members at Bayview were unhappy with this ( a move prompted by the Headteacher to make an example of these pupils), arguing that there was nothing constructive to be done for these pupils and that this alone should have guided the decision :

*what you do depends on the case, not on the other kids.*

*( Bayview )*

## CHAPTER 9

### THE REPORTER

As described in Chapter 2 the Reporter receives non-attendance referrals from School Attendance Committees and, less usually, from the schools themselves. Generally the actual involvement of the Reporter with the cases will be limited to deciding whether or not the case should be referred to the Children's Hearing for consideration by a group of panel members. The Reporter's task is therefore largely confined to examining information and assessing the value of this, having in most cases little contact with the families themselves. However, the considerations of the Reporter form a crucial part of the process for the pupils.

It was found that the main concern when the Reporter considered a case was the best interests of the pupil concerned centering on a consideration of individual circumstances and background problems, the central issue being whether or not the pupil would benefit from compulsory measures of care and whether a hearing could offer anything of benefit to the pupil. Reporters were annoyed by previous attempts to threaten pupils, arguing that the main concern must be whether and how help can be provided by the resources available to them, although it will become apparent that there was some awareness of, and response to, the pressure for law enforcement.

### FUNCTIONS

Following receipt of a referral (which may be made by anybody), the Reporter must make enquiries in order to satisfy himself that a) he can constitute grounds for referral to a hearing and b) that the child is in need of measures of care other than that which is provided by his/her parents. There

are then three options available:

1) He can take no further action other than to advise the child and parent and the person who brought the case to his notice, of his decision.

2) He can refer the case of the child to the local authority for voluntary measures of care to be made available.

3) He can refer the case of the child to a children's hearing.

## **PRACTICE**

### **Receipt of a Referral**

The two main referral agencies for non-attending pupils are the Attendance Committee and the schools ( reflecting the fact that generally there will have been some previous attempts to deal with the behaviour both within and outwith the school). It became clear that the majority of cases had been involved in the entire process described thus far ( some action by the guidance teachers, an attendance committee continued for six weeks and then referral) and only 2/37 of the reports examined involved direct referral by the schools.

In terms of the Reporter's overall caseload, these purely non-attendance referrals formed only a small proportion of the cases involved (an estimate of 5 - 10% was made), with the Reporter suggesting that although truancy is a factor in many offence cases, where non-attendance is the sole factor, the School Attendance Committee will have been reached first.

The Reporter, in fact, was concerned about this situation, and expressed a strong preference for the receipt of direct referrals. The

Department felt that as many as possible should be sent from the school, with the Regional Reporter arguing that schools were being urged to make such referrals. However, as the Divisional Reporter acknowledged:

*It varies a lot in terms of their initiative that they show, their understanding and what flexibility they can use.*

This accords with the situation discovered in the schools in terms of their view of the nature of truancy, the measures they were willing to attempt and the purpose of their action. With many of the schools wishing to use the threat of sanctions as the mechanism to return pupils, clearly the SAC would remain the means of doing this. However, given the Reporter's main concerns, this clearly frustrated his purpose.

Generally, in practice, the only circumstances in which the schools would make direct referral to the Reporter was when the child was felt to be at risk, and such circumstances were rare. (Again this accords with the reasons given by the guidance staff for direct referral.) The Reporter felt referral should be the immediate step following discovery of any problems or when school measures had failed to secure the pupils return. As seen, however, schools often interpreted this as defiance and unwillingness to make an effort to attend, thus requiring a controlling response.

The main reasons for the dissatisfaction with the Attendance Committee stage were twofold. Firstly, the length of time spent in such attempts to secure the pupil's return was criticised. The procedure was seen to be:

*a bureaucratic exercise, taking a lot of time*

and delaying the provision of problem solving measures where these were

necessary. This implication of the nature of Attendance Committee action was suggested in the previous chapter, and was certainly seen to create further difficulties for the families.

Secondly, the nature of the action was criticised:

*one of our real difficulties is that a kid comes to a hearing, and you say 'first time you've been to a hearing?' 'Oh no, I've been before at the school' and you think, Christ, he means the Attendance Committee, which is horrible, because it gives them an expectation of how they're going to be treated... it really hampers us.*

This is clearly a potential problem with the suggestion that a family's negative experiences in their dealings with schools and/or attendance committees may lead to a suspicion of other bodies, assuming their purpose and method to be the same. Certainly it seems the nature of attendance committee action identified in the previous chapter was borne out by the Reporter's experience.

All the Reporters were concerned about the manner of the proceedings at the attendance committees, feeling that:

*at least some of them are pretty draconian*

*and*

*the child and the parents are told to get back to school and they're given a bollocking.*

There was also considerable disquiet about the lack of attempt which would have been made to alleviate any problems.

The Regional Reporter had, in the light of the feeling in the Department, produced a set of guidelines for the schools to follow, suggesting that:

*in cases where factors other than irregular attendance are*

*present and the case is such that compulsory measures of care would appear to offer positive assistance to the child, then early referral to the Reporter should be made. In other cases, all possible efforts should be made by the schools themselves and by such resources as are available to them to deal with the problem.*

By this means the Reporter's Department was attempting to encourage the schools to deal themselves with truancy which was solely based on minor school problems and to take positive action for any others. This would be a much broader group of pupils than perhaps at present reach the Reporter, allowing more non-attenders the possibility of a more thorough examination of their circumstances. However, this would also rely on more action by, for example, Bayview guidance staff to make such a distinction, and also implies for Bayview, Birchwood and to an extent Oakbank a reexamination of their views on the nature and causes of truancy.

These criticisms of the referral process were based on the position taken by the Reporters that in most cases the non-attendance would be symptomatic of home difficulties requiring specialist help. The main concern became thus to receive cases as quickly as possible in order to begin the input of help.

### **The Collection of Information**

Having received the referral, in order to decide how to proceed the Reporter would then examine the information available and collect any further necessary background details. From a School Attendance Committee referral, the Reporter would receive a standard form, giving the child's family background, the number of absences, the reasons given, a short report by the EWO and a summary of previous contacts made. Along with this,

*we tend to get a two line thing from the Clerk telling us that*

*the case is being referred to us because....*

In the case of direct referrals from the school, the content of the information provided was said to vary according to the experience of the teacher submitting the case, but in both types of referral the information was said to be flimsy. Given the nature of the previous contacts and the lack of in-depth examination of family problems at earlier stages, this is not surprising.

Again the consequences of this were to complicate the process for the Reporter:

*one of the problems is that they often say that a child is beyond control, full stop. our requirement is to state facts - they don't give these facts, but they decide that because mum or a schoolteacher has said he's out late at nights and he won't do what his mother tells him, that is beyond control, or schools very often say that because he is not going to school, that is beyond parental control... they don't often give us too much, so we wouldn't rush into a hearing.*

This illustrates the differences between the agencies: the desire of the Attendance Committees to apportion fault and the need of the Reporter to take full consideration of the individual circumstances.

This problem was seen during observation with a direct school referral for non-attendance. The letter from the school said that the girl was not attending and that it was felt that she was at moral risk. The Reporter pointed out that there was no indication of why this was thought to be the case, and then had to examine her previous social background report and contact the social worker concerned to ask for up to date information.

The Reporter felt that the information they most needed to receive related to the social background of the pupil. Generally a Social Work assessment of the home situation would be collected:

*that's the most important bit.*

These reports contained detailed accounts, usually covering family composition, home circumstances, pupils' and parents' views of the truancy, the present attendance situation and a thorough discussion of any specific difficulties. A further school report (on a standard form) would also be collected and any other agency which had been involved (e.g. Child Guidance) would be contacted.

The schools were asked (in the Regional Reporter's Guidelines) to

*provide him with as much information as possible*

*and that*

*the content of the report be based on the teacher's previous knowledge of the child.*

The lack of information was apparent in those reports examined, and school reports contained only details of school matters (in many cases it seemed these are the only factors of which schools would be aware), the only discussion of home circumstances being restricted to a description of contact (or lack of) with the parent. The following provides an example of a school report and the information therein:

*Attainment not commensurate with ability. Pupil referred to a previous attendance committee. Not a troublemaker but not accepted by peers. Parents concerned. No medical reasons. Changed schools recently and attendance no better.*

For this reason there was a tendency to rely on the social background report, the main concern being to establish a complete picture of the pupil's circumstances. From this, the decision would be made on the course of action to follow. In practice, the Reporter had four options : no further action,



voluntary measures and referral to a hearing (as outlined) but also an informal discussion with the child and parents (falling under the umbrella of no further action). The relation of the information to the decision must now be considered.

### **No Further Action**

The official reason given in the annual report of the Department for taking no action was stated to be:

*where he (the Reporter) believes that the parents are capable of exercising appropriate measures of 'care' for their own child.*

In practical terms this was interpreted by the Reporter as being the situation where there had been a transitory problem which had caused the non-attendance and which had passed. The Reporters would also take into account whether the child had been back to school in the intervening period (between SAC meeting and the time the case was considered) as well as

*what's the social work assessment of the parents' abilities to make sure the child continues at school.*

The absence of any persistent causal problems would be seen to render referral to a hearing inappropriate.

One further distinct group of pupils for whom generally no action would be taken was those who were approaching their leaving date. As the Regional Reporter stated:

*there are big arguments about the relevance of school to especially 15 and a half plus who tend to vote with their feet. If all other things were right in the family, I wouldn't want to be involved in that.*

In both cases the Reporter felt that the hearing would have no support to offer.

*It's like the offence case - you can't say somebody needs to come to a hearing because of the gravity of the offence, the tariff idea - if we're a treatment plan then the discretion is important... it's having confidence to say that I'm not getting involved.*

### **Discussions With the Family**

This additional option, as stated, was often used when the Reporter would be taking no further action. It could also be used alongside voluntary measures. Families in such cases would be invited to the Reporter's office to discuss any difficulties for which the hearing resources were felt to be inappropriate, although the measure was felt to be of limited use in truancy.

*we're perhaps aware that the family have already spoken to a considerable number of people.*

The purpose, shared by the Reporters interviewed was to look at the child's reasons and talk them through, where there was some concern, but it was felt that a hearing and compulsory measures would be of little benefit, such discussion being sufficient to clear up the difficulties.

In a sense the Reporters were carrying out a function which could have been done at an earlier stage with a different approach by guidance staff or attendance committees.

During the discussions observed and in all such cases, the Reporter went through the child's attitude to school, why the child found it difficult to attend, what steps could be taken in the future and the parents' abilities to deal with it, as well as giving the opportunity for any other problems to

emerge at this stage.

This was observed in two cases during the period of observation. In both, the Reporter worked through the non-attendance attempting to find a solution. In the first, the boy was concerned about returning to the school because of the attitudes of the teaching staff, who,

*will all be sarcastic.*

The boy had suffered an illness and had found it difficult to return on recovery. He also had additional problems as all his friends had left school. The Reporter established that there were no home problems and proceeded to provide encouragement to attend until his leaving date.

The Reporter then attempted to persuade the boy to return, and subsequently (the following day) telephoned the school to discover that this had happened. However, it was clear that the Reporter felt that such a case did not merit compulsory measures of care and that the dislike of school with no adjoining home problems did not provide grounds for action through the hearing system.

In the second case there was a problem with the boy's home circumstances, as he was living with his granny, and failing to lead a normal teenager's life. The boy had an unsettled background and the social work investigation suggested that although a hearing was not necessary some discussion of the difficulties might be useful.

The Reporter worked through the boy's interests and hobbies before moving on to the lack of school attendance. The Reporter suggested talking to a member of school staff. They also discussed his friends and home circumstances and the Reporter pointed out to the boy that any time he

wanted, he could talk to a social worker. The boy was also told he was welcome to talk to the Reporter if he felt the need to.

Both the cases served to highlight a group of pupils for whom it was felt that the most appropriate course of action was to discuss, with sympathy and understanding, the difficulties being faced. The resources available through the hearings were not appropriate but the pupils needed some support which had not, to this stage, been provided. This informal course by the Reporter appeared to fill a gap created by the nature of the schools' approach and perception of the causes.

In the first case, however, an additional concern is suggested – part of the justification for the action was a response to repeated demands by the school to take action in order to end the boy's non-attendance and to deter others. There is some notion (although Reporters may argue otherwise) of law enforcement to meet the demands of compulsory school attendance. The Reporter informed the boy that he would telephone the school to discover whether or not he had returned, and in a sense this could be seen to be a controlling mechanism along the lines of previous checks. The difference however, was that the Reporter felt that the discussion had provided some help in the process.

The pressure to respond to the different concerns of the school were attributed :

*One school went as far as to send us a page of the register with the record of everybody in the girl's class, to try to demonstrate the effect the girl's truancy was having, to which we had to reply that we don't give a damn.*

The Reporters were keen to point out that :

*we're not going to make a decision to refer to a hearing just because the school is saying that he's taking the others away.*

Perhaps this use of informal measures functions as a means of reconciling the different aims, the distinguishing feature being that :

*I don't see it as dealing with truancy , I see it as dealing with a youngster who has a problem in regard to some aspect of his life. We do things for a youngster, and truancy may be the presenting problem.*

### **Voluntary Measures**

This, as seen, was also often associated with discussion with the family and the second case, above, highlights the type of case in which this might be felt to be appropriate.

The annual report saw this method as necessary when:

*he [the Reporter] believes that the child is in need of some measures of care, but that that care can be supplied by the local authority Social Work Department on a voluntary basis and that this will receive the support of the child and parents.*

Thus, in all these cases, some background problems would be preventing the school attendance and social work intervention would be seen to be necessary. The parent, however, would be requesting help and thus the compulsion which necessitated a hearing would be unnecessary as the support would be provided.

However, the shortage of social work resources at the time of observation was making this avenue less attractive. The effect of this was that unless a supervision requirement was placed on the child, they would be unlikely to provide help. As one Reporter pointed out :

*I personally believe that it's sad that we're not able to refer more cases for voluntary measures of care, because from time to time we're forced into the situation of taking the view that unless we refer for compulsory measures, these measures will not be provided.*

### **Referral to a Hearing**

The official guidance given for referral to a hearing is :

*where he believes that the child is in need of compulsory measures of care.*

The way in which the Reporter measured this was by, as seen, considering the problems he felt to be contributing to the truancy. An assessment was made on the basis of whether or not the parents were able to provide this care, or whether in fact the problems were such that statutory help was necessary. This would be coupled with continued lack of attendance which would be taken to indicate the persistence of problems, and the suggestion that the attendance would be unlikely to improve without the input of assistance.

In practice, those cases which did reach the hearing stage fulfilled the above criteria, with difficulties at home generally being discovered during the social work investigation. Examples of the types of problems isolated were : parental difficulties (such as lack of care, violence, separation, drink/ drugs, lack of ability to cope), home problems (related to deprivation) and problems of the pupils (lack of friends, unhappiness).

In the light of the extent of some of the problems and the time taken for such cases to come to the stage of receiving statutory help, the Reporter's frustration with the previous methods can be understood. In many cases this

would be the first attempt to take any action other than to sanction the pupils and prolong the threats.

The Reporters felt that the hearing was the most appropriate forum to discuss such issues and direct the families to suitable support. Given the perceived situation, whereby :

*the average class teacher has not got the skills or the time or the inclination to deal with it*

early referral was seen to become crucial.

## CHAPTER 10

## THE HEARINGS - PANEL MEMBERS

Following a decision to refer a case to a children's hearing, panel members will be notified and will receive copies of both school and social work reports. The family will also be notified and a date fixed for a hearing. The hearing is to provide a forum for discussion, an examination of problems and the direction of families to the most appropriate help.

In practice, the hearing, too, in many cases becomes a further mechanism for the control of behaviour seen to be deviant. Parallels could be drawn between the methods of some hearings and the School Attendance Committees of Oakbank, Ashdale and Birchwood with a combination of techniques used to coerce and control the pupils until they accepted the values of the panel members. This was not, however, true in all cases, and some pupils with home problems did find a sympathetic forum for the discussion of their difficulties. The basis of this action, however, can be called into question and the contradictions of the actual hearing process will become apparent.

**The Hearing Process**

At a non-attendance hearing, the child and one or both parents will be present, three lay panel members (one of whom will chair the meeting) the Reporter (in an advisory capacity), a Social Worker and often a Guidance Teacher from the school. The hearing will then proceed, with the child, family and panel being introduced to each other and the chairperson reading to the family the grounds on which the child has been referred. These grounds must be accepted before the hearing can proceed. In the course of the subsequent discussion, the social worker and guidance teacher may be asked for



information and opinion.

The panel members have four options :

1.To discharge a referral – taking no further action on a case

2.To adjourn a case – continuing a case for a period of time. This can be done when panel members feel that they require further reports and information. In such cases the Reporter would, at the hearing, fix a date for the subsequent hearing and attempt to provide some continuity of panel members.

3.Home Supervision – involving compulsory supervision by a Social Worker, the child remaining with his/her family.

4.Residential Supervision – involving compulsory supervision in a specified place other than the child's home (e.g. List D school, foster parents etc).

At the close of the hearing, this decision will be made with the child and family present, each panel member expressing his/her view and the reason for the conclusion they have reached. In the event of disagreement, a majority decision will be taken. The family should then be given a written copy of the reasons for the decision and informed of their right of appeal. Where a supervision requirement has been made, responsibility passes to the Social Work Department. In these cases, the hearing may be the last stage in a lengthy decision making process with the action to be taken finally being outlined.

## PRACTICE

### The Hearing Process

Usually, prior to the hearing the panel members met in a small room adjacent to the hearing room, using this time to read through school and social work reports (although not usually for the first time). Although there would be some discussion of the pupil's circumstances, on no occasion was a decision reached prior to discussion with the family. The panel members then entered the hearing room (which for the cases observed was a room with a large table around which all participants sat). On all occasions, the family was asked at the outset to accept the grounds of referral and in all cases, there was no dispute with these.

The course of the hearing thereafter was dependent on whether or not the case had previously been continued. Of the 13 hearings observed, 7 were new truancy referrals, 3 were reviews of supervision requirements and 3 had been previously adjourned. Typical patterns for each type were as follows.

In those cases which were new referrals, the pattern was clear. the panel members, at the instigation of the chairperson began with a discussion of the school situation, addressing questions to the pupil and attempting to elicit the reasons for the truancy. Six of the seven cases involved home problems (supporting the reporter's comments about the type of case referred), but the panel members focussed initially on the pattern of school attendance. The discussion did then turn to home problems, and each family member was asked to comment on these. Even where families were clearly in conflict, an attempt was made to elicit all views. The following provides an example of this :

In this case, all the members of the family fought consistently throughout the hearing. The panel members drew out how each member felt, worked through what they felt to be problems and got all parties to discuss their expectations in an attempt to get them to understand their respective points of view.

Such discussion generally formed the substance of the hearing, which would conclude with an overview of what each participant felt would be best for the pupil (including the child's view of this). The panel members would finally discuss what they felt to be the most appropriate solution (examined later). The discussion process itself certainly differed from the Attendance Committee procedure, panel members being prepared to examine sometimes difficult home circumstances without emphasising the benefits of schooling and without threatening the pupils with further action. Some fairly sensitive issues were addressed :

In one of the cases observed the girl had an older boyfriend and had been missing from home. There had also been problems in the house caused by the lack of available space. The family did not bring these issues up in the course of the discussion and one of the panel members introduced them into the conversation. A further example was provided by a case where the girl's mother had previously had a drink problem. She was directly (but sympathetically) asked about this ;

*You had some trouble with drinking before ..... how's that now?*

As the majority of truancy referrals observed offered some home problems, this was the predominant form the proceedings took.

However, in the one other new referral, there was no such evidence

of home problems and the course followed was markedly different

In this case, the girl had a history of non-attendance and had attended a hearing previously (although not recently). Firstly, the girl was asked for her reasons for not going to school and she stated that she was bored, did not like the work being offered and found it difficult. The panel members then attempted to establish whether or not she had any home background problems.

When none could be elicited, and it was clear that the problem related solely to the school situation, the discussion was reminiscent of Oakbank, Ashdale and Birchwood Attendance Committees. The panel members asked about school experiences, likes and dislikes and future job prospects. This was then presented as an incentive to return to the school, with an emphasis on the waste of opportunity and talent by following a pattern of non-attendance.

At this point, she was also threatened with the possibility of a List D placement should the attendance fail to improve. Although the girl did participate in this discussion, it seemed the panel had little to focus on and chose only to encourage and threaten, finding nothing in terms of actual solution. Once again, the possibility of future action was held as the sole means of securing a return, with no help offered.

It is interesting to note at this point that there was a general uneasiness in the hearing system in relation to school based problems, and as at earlier stages in the process, it seemed little could be done. This may reflect the inflexibility of the school system and may in part reflect the limitations of the resources available, but in the end such cases were offered

no help or solution, the tendency being to view this as a more trivial matter, soluble by the pupil. This case, with no apparent home problems, also shows that in some cases, the Reporter would make the decision to refer in response to pressure from the School/School Attendance Committee on the length of truancy alone.

The remainder of the cases observed involved reviews or adjourned cases. Firstly, in the reviews, the pattern followed was similar to that adopted in initial hearings where there were home problems. The present situation of the child would be discussed. In cases under supervision, the child might either be staying with his/her family or in residential supervision, and he/she would first be asked how things were progressing in the family and/or the school. Information and comment would also be sought from the parents and guidance teacher, as well as the Social Worker, to support this.

Any problems which had arisen either for the child or any other involved party would then be discussed in terms of how it affected each. Where problems arose (one out of the three cases), these problems were dealt with in a similar manner to the initial hearing (sympathetic discussion), but the family was also asked what was done to solve the difficulties. Finally, in a manner similar to the conclusion of the initial hearing, the present situation would be appraised, and the parties discussed what required to be done.

In all these cases, there had been an improvement in the attendance and an easing of the initial presenting problem. It is not possible to comment on the possible situation which would have occurred should the behaviour/attendance have deteriorated. Finally, the adjourned cases observed were of two types. The first type concerned the use of this disposal "to allow for improvement" (the method condemned at the School Attendance

Committee by the Reporter). This clearly relied on threat of action without support to end the non-attendance. By this stage in the process, this type of action would already have failed, often on many occasions. This will be further discussed later.

The discussion process, too, centred on school issues, explaining to the pupil that he/she had been brought back :

*to show that you could attend school in the meantime*

and the way in which the attendance/lack of attendance affected the disposal will be subsequently examined.

The second type of adjourned case involved those for whom some form of residential placement had been deemed to be necessary at the previous hearing and the purpose of the adjournment had been either to find a suitable place for the pupil or to allow the family to visit the suggested alternatives. This appeared to be a straightforward process, bearing in mind that any problems in the pupil's circumstances would have been isolated, discussed and the solution decided at a previous hearing.

These hearings by nature concentrated on discussing which of the alternatives the family had been to visit and their impressions of each. The views of all the family members would again be taken into account, before discussing what option was likely to be most appropriate for the pupil.

The actual decisions must now be considered in an attempt to isolate which specific types of factor in these cases provoked each type of response and what criteria panel members used in making such a decision.

### **The Decision to Discharge a Referral**

Only one of the hearings observed involved discharging the case, and the presenting problem had apparently been eliminated in the intervening period. The boy concerned had been involved in solvent abuse and had been missing school at this time. However, an accident had led to a spell in hospital and the abuse had since stopped. The panel engaged the boy in a thorough discussion of his home circumstances, family relationships, hobbies and school behaviour, as well as clarifying the current situation with the Social Worker. Having satisfied themselves through the reports, discussion and the boy's assurances that the behaviour causing concern would not happen again, the referral was discharged.

It seems a good deal of importance was attached to the resumption of attendance rather than the situation which had led to the solvent abuse.

In the records which were examined (giving panels' decisions and reasons), 6/37 were also found to have been discharged, and the written reasons given by the panel members also provided an indication of the basis of the decision. Four of the six cases had previously been adjourned, this being the continued hearing to review the circumstances and make the final decision.

The aspect common to all these cases and the reason given by the panel members in each of them was that in the intervening period, the pupil had returned to school, and they were satisfied that he/she would continue to attend. In some cases the panel gave more detailed reasons, pointing out for example what had been done either within or outwith the school to change things, for example :

*atmosphere at home better or*

or

*timetable altered to suit her better,*

but all were now back in full time attendance. In the two cases adjourned at their initial hearings, no family problems could be found and assurances of continued good attendance were given by all family members.

It could be argued that this indicated the solution of problems causing the behaviour, but as stated earlier, adjourned cases relied on the commitment and concern of the family rather than the provision of help, suggesting that the discharge would be rather more dependent on the compliance of the pupil than the problem-solving process.

All the panel members stressed at interview that the child must be making an effort to return, taken to be a good indicator of future behaviour. It seems change in the pupil was being sought rather than change in the pupil's circumstances.

A final reason for discharging a case, given by half the panel members was where the pupil was approaching his/her leaving date. This had been a consideration for each group of decision makers at each stage in the process, and it seems that on occasions where leavers had progressed through the procedures and reached the hearing, this would be the decision.

This has become increasingly apparent as a group of pupils for whom no agency has the inclination or the capacity to provide solution. However, the fact that such pupils do reach this stage suggests that concerns other than simply the existence of family problems must influence the Reporter's referral.



Although it might be possible to argue that these particular leavers were problem-based cases, even if this were the case, the panel members did not act upon this.

### **Adjourn**

As seen, cases were frequently adjourned by panel members, and although this was officially to obtain further reports where there is insufficient information, in practice this method, as seen, was also used to allow the pupil an opportunity to improve, and although panel members were more reluctant to admit this, carrying with it the implicit threat that if the pupil failed to return to the school, the action taken would be stronger.

Adjournment appeared to be a popular course of action by the panel members, with this being the outcome for 5/13 of the cases observed (despite the fact that almost all had home problems) and 14/37 of those whose records were examined. When the 19 adjourned cases were examined in more detail, they divided into three types which will be considered separately : those adjourned for the provision of further reports (6); those adjourned to consider alternatives (5) and those adjourned to give the pupils a chance to return to school in the meantime (8) in order to prove that the attendance would continue.

Those adjourned in order to provide information or to consider alternatives were fairly straightforward. Where further information was needed, this took a variety of forms. In one case, the teacher was not present at the hearing and it was felt this was necessary, as the panel all felt there must be school causes behind the truancy. In two others, the Social Work report had been delayed. In the remaining cases some aspect of the child's behaviour at the hearing had given the panel cause to request further examination, one

panel requesting a residential assessment for a girl not attending at all, coupled with allegations of sexual interference.

Special education was involved in another case, as there was felt to be a need to assess the boy's learning ability. Finally, the Young People's Unit at the local psychiatric hospital was requested to assess a pupil who was living in poor conditions, with her parents' marital situation causing problems and the Social Worker having an

*impression of serious problems.*

Similarly, the reasons for adjournment in order to examine available alternatives were clear. In all these cases the decision had been made at a previous hearing to place the child in residential supervision, and the adjournment was to allow the family to consider the placements found by the Social Worker, to decide which would best suit the needs of the pupil concerned.

The third group of pupils, however, involved those being given the opportunity to prove to the panel that they could attend regularly. In most cases two reasons for this were given by the panel : to give the pupil the chance to show that he/she could attend, and because the pupil gave assurances that he/she would go back to school. In several cases, parental commitment was also given as a reason, suggesting that where parents were encouraging a return and supporting the pupil's efforts, this would not indicate the necessity of compulsory measures of care.

As suggested earlier, this would have been tried by the Attendance Committee, but is perhaps partly explained by the discovery of panel members'

lack of knowledge of the nature and purpose of the previous action. Although some of the panel members were aware of the personnel who would have been involved, the awareness of the actual measures which had been taken was minimal, particularly at Attendance Committee stage. Most admitted they :

*haven't a clue what happens*

and

*I know they exist, I don't know what powers they have.*

None could give any description of what the process involved and the types of decision that could be made. With the large number (indeed the majority) of cases reaching the hearing having been referred by the Attendance Committees, this lack of awareness helps to explain the duplication of methods of dealing with the problem. As discussed, the actual conduct of such a hearing involved discussion of school factors and reliance on threat :

*you've done nothing to convince us you'll go back and [the local List-D school] has a vacancy just now.*

It was found, on examination of the records that there was no clear explanation of the causes of the behaviour. In fact this was true for a significant number of pupils again suggesting that such cases may well reach hearings and form a group for whom panel members had no idea what action to take.

Three of the panel members at interview recognised and commented on the problem ;

*this is sometimes where we find ourselves in conflict, because we are asked to become big authority figures and to use the threat of further compulsory measures of care.*

These members confined the use of adjournment to the official task of collecting further information and reports as they :

*don't like continuing to see if they improve.....you're there to make a decision on behalf of that child.*

The remaining seven saw no contradiction in their use of this.

### **Home Supervision**

This measure was used in 2/13 observed cases and 11/37 of the reports examined. This, too, however, could be split into three groups - those who were already on supervision and came for review (5), those cases being continued after adjournment (4) and those cases given home supervision after their first hearing (4).

Of those cases being reviewed, two had previously been with foster parents, two in List D schools and one already on home supervision. Such hearings were to vary the disposal from residential to home supervision. The reasons given were that the pupils had made good progress in the residential settings and had been attending school. All these cases had encouraging reports, with the proviso that they could still benefit from social work help but would be likely to maintain the progress, measureable by their return to regular school attendance.

Of those continued after adjournment, this had been for reports to be collected, and in all cases adverse circumstances had been discovered which necessitated social work help, for example :

*underlying difficulties in the family which could be aired in discussion with a social worker.*

This was also the concern in those cases in which a home supervision requirement was made at the first hearing - the only real difference between the groups being the sufficiency of information at the outset. Again, difficulties in family relationships emerged.

All panel members mentioned the family (either child or parent) being in need of some form of support which was making it difficult for them to attend school. The purpose of this intervention was seen to be to get the social worker to counsel the family. Some panel members also suggested that social workers would, however, be unwilling to take action in truancy cases (a factor mentioned in the schools). It was pointed out that in practical terms, a social worker could do little about school attendance problems, rendering this disposal fairly ineffectual.

#### **Residential Supervision**

Finally, this measure, in the form of List D schooling or other form of residential placement was used in four of the cases observed and four of the cases for which reports were examined.

In one of the cases, the home problems were so great that immediate removal from the home was seen to be necessary. Here, the girl's mother was ill and drinking heavily, the girl was staying at home to look after her, the father had left, there was not always food in the house and the situation was felt to be unhealthy for an adolescent. The needs of the young person were seen to be uppermost, and it was felt that she should not take responsibility for her mother. The chairperson explained this to the girl and her mother by stating that sometimes the panel had to make apparently hard decisions in the best interests of the child.

The majority of cases, however, indeed the remaining seven, involved a failure to improve attendance despite earlier measures (adjournment/home supervision) :

*it was made clear to ..... that he must attend school ,otherwise a residential placement would seriously be considered by the panel*

and in another case :

*All other options have been tried. It has been a year and a half since she began truanting and we felt she was at risk spending her time at the St James Centre and in danger of mixing with bad company.*

This notion of using residential placement as a last resort was mentioned by six of the panel members at interview, suggesting that everything else would previously have failed and this was the only option remaining :

*for the child who doesn't conform to a large secondary school, there's very little alternative.*

Any emphasis on welfare was thus diluted by viewing the provision as the only remaining means of dealing with intractable truants, within a system of/ offering little in the way of support.

**CHAPTER 11****THE PROCURATOR FISCAL/COURT ACTION**

The final agency involved in dealing with non-attendance is the Procurator Fiscal's Office receiving referrals only from School Attendance Committees. The decision must be made whether or not to prosecute the parents of truanting pupils, and it was found that, with the options available to the Procurator Fiscal unquestionably punitive, the predominant concern was one of law enforcement and securing attendance. In this case the controlling response was overt - there was no attempt to explain the action in terms of providing help, rather to explain the situation in terms of securing the compulsory attendance of the pupils. Fiscals presented their task as to respond to the law breaking through prosecution, with concern only to meet the conditions of proof and the "public interest". It was not, however, based on entirely punitive concerns also involving a system of priorities to respond to administrative considerations.

**FUNCTIONS**

The Procurator Fiscal will receive a truancy referral from the Education Department, following a School Attendance Committee. The referral takes the form of a letter requesting prosecution and the case will then be "marked" by a member of the Summary Team. The decision in relation to prosecution must then be made. The Procurator Fiscal has three options:

(1) to mark the case "no proceedings" - in fact to take no further action in respect of the parent. Where this happens, the documents will be returned to the Education Department with a covering letter to say that they

have been marked "no action".

(2) to issue a warning letter, which involves writing to the parents to point out that the Procurator Fiscal has sufficient evidence against them, but is not going to prosecute in this instance. The letter also warns about future conduct.

(3) to prosecute the parent in the District Court. In these cases, the documents will be passed for the diet to be fixed. Procurators Fiscal have six months in which to take the case to court. The citation department will arrange which day the case is to go to court and arrange for a service of the charge on the accused. Parents are generally given three weeks notice of impending court appearance.

These are the options available to the Procurator Fiscal, and both (1) and (2) signal the end of a non-attendance case, and should either of these options be chosen, dealings with the family would be terminated. Any further proceedings would necessitate a fresh School Attendance Committee and the case would begin from the first stages once again.

The third course, however, involves formal legal action and the ensuing action depends on the plea of the parent. Should the parent plead guilty, the disposal will be made immediately in the court, the accused having the opportunity to put forward any points, and the punishment imposed at that time. The maximum penalty for such an offence is a fine of £50 or one month's imprisonment.

In the case of a not guilty plea, the trial date would be fixed at the first hearing, then the trial would subsequently take place. The parent and the Procurator Fiscal would put forward evidence, and in Education Act cases



much of the prosecution is based on certificates. Proof of non-attendance in the form of a Headteacher's Certificate is sufficient. Following the trial, if the parent was found guilty, the procedure followed that for a guilty plea.

In cases where the parent fails to appear on the designated date, the court may issue a warrant to secure this. If this happens, the warrant is passed to the Procurator Fiscal, and the parent is called back by letter. If the parent does not attend, the warrant will be issued and the parent may appear from custody. It will be up to the police to decide whether or not to enforce the warrant. When the parent finally does appear, he/she will also be expected to answer the charge of failing to appear.

## **PRACTICE**

### **The Information Available**

With a non-attendance referral, the Procurator Fiscal will receive a number of documents, containing information about the pupil and the family. These were examined for sixteen cases, and in each the following were included:

#### **(1) Letter from the Education Department**

This letter gave the names of the parent and the child, the child's date of birth, the date of any Attendance Order and the period of charge (i.e. the dates of the irregular attendance). A fairly typical example of the request therein was as follows:

*should be glad if you would take the necessary steps for the prosecution of the parent under Section () of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 for an offence against Section (\*)*

\* This Section varied according to whether or not the case was a breach of an Attendance Order.

## (2) School Report

The School Report gave the name, address and occupation of the parent; the name age, date of birth, school class and leaving date of the child; actual and possible attendance with the number of broken weeks and the reasons given for the lack of attendance, with their date and course. Whether or not the child had been examined by a medical officer was included, as was any contact with a Hearing or the Social Work Department. Finally, particulars of the household were included, with the names, ages and schools of siblings, and dates of any School Attendance Committees. The report provided, as seen, factual information in order to establish the family composition and details of the offence.

## (3) EWO Report

This report, which would have been presented to the School Attendance Committee, gave details of attendance and any previous irregularity, any contact made with the parent and the reasons which had been given, and, in most cases, the EWO's opinion of the parent's views in relation to school and school attendance.

In addition to these reports, a copy of any existing attendance order, a certificate of attendance and the child's pink card would be included.

Unlike the Reporter's Department, with the power to collect further information with regard to background and circumstances, the Procurator Fiscal must make the decision on the basis of the available information,

suggesting, in accordance with the legalistic orientation, that the focus was on the factual detail of the offence and the accused rather than on the motivation for the action. The decision was wholly based on the information contained in these reports.

There was no contact with the family on the part of the Procurator Fiscal, this being felt to be unnecessary, as generally there's sufficient material to make a decision. In fact, there was seen to be little point in providing detailed descriptions of cases, as it was suggested that

*normally our first response is just to take proceedings, I'm afraid.*

Some of the information, however, on further examination was found to have some bearing on the decision, and this must now be examined.

#### **The Decision To Take No Proceedings**

The overall reason given by the Senior Depute for taking no action was that the Procurator Fiscal might decide:

*it didn't merit proceedings in the public interest,*

a term used to justify whether or not action was taken. However, in the public interest was clearly impossible to quantify, and this had to be clarified in terms of its operational interpretation.

What became clear was that the main consideration for a lack of proceedings was the proximity of the pupil's leaving date and the resources available at the time. All those interviewed stated, and all the discussions highlighted that no action would be taken if the child had reached the age of

16 by the time the referral came to this stage. In practice this effectively had been extended to include those within several months of their leaving date.

This indicated a more complex decision on the part of the Procurator Fiscal's Office. If the response was merely one of enforcing punishment and enforcing the law, with the accordant deterrence of others, such cases would serve as an example to others. However, this *laissez faire* response indicates more of a need to control those pupils whose age necessitates attendance, but to ignore this outwith this group.

The exception to this situation was suggested as being whether a child had school age siblings (although in practice this was not a significant concern).

Of the 16 case examined, 6 were cases which the Procurator Fiscal concerned decided would not be prosecuted. This examination showed conclusively the importance of leaving date. The ages of the pupils in question were; 15,5; 15,10; 15,10; 15,7; 15,11; and 16,0; (the eldest of the children in cases to be prosecuted was 14,4). The leaving dates also suggested that this was the main distinguishing factor in two types of case: of the 6 marked "no proceedings", 4 had May 1985 leaving dates and 2 had Christmas 1985 dates (this stage of the fieldwork took place in March 1985). Of the 10 who were prosecuted, all had leaving dates of 1986 or later.

The argument that other children in the family of school age would be an important consideration was not borne out at this stage, as four of the six did have siblings in this category. In the Procurator Fiscal's explanations of these cases, again the prime importance of the leaving date came across.

CASE 1 had an older and a younger brother, but was 15,10 and

leaving in May 1985. It was explained that as she was leaving so soon it would be pointless to prosecute.

CASE 2 had a younger brother of 13, but was also 15,10 ans had by this stage turned 16. Again the explanation was given that he was too close to leaving to take action.

CASE 3 was another May leaver with 5 younger children at school, but was now 16. The Procurator Fiscal giving the explanation stated that it would not be prosecuted because of the age and they would have to hope that the other children would improve. Failing this, it was suggested that they would be bound to eventually "get a younger child to prosecute".

CASE 4 was a December leaver with three younger children in the family, but age 15,7 ruled out action.

Even, therefore, where there were younger pupils, no action would be taken when the leaving date approached. The two cases where there were no siblings were also entirely explained by this consideration.

By March, therefore, May leavers were wholly ignored and December leavers were also being considered for no proceedings. The December decision was at this stage stated to be more difficult, but in the 2 cases which were not prosecuted, the timing, combined with the age of the child was important, and the likely decision of the court became a factor. The following case illustrates this:

The case (already mentioned) had three younger siblings. The girl still had to attend until December. The Procurator Fiscal explained that normally they would go ahead with such a case, but it would reach the District Court

in the school holidays and would therefore be admonished. It was restated that the Procurator Fiscal had to have some belief that action would ensue before prosecution would be recommended.

This adds a further dimension to the decision, and lends further support to the purpose of control of truancy rather than example (to others) or punishment for law breaking.

A related issue in terms of the perceived response of the court related to the resources available.

It was suggested that when the District Court was full with cases, attention would be paid to the seriousness of the case:

*we have marked a greater number of cases no proceedings in recent months because of pressures of work and staff shortages.*

At this point it was stated that the suggestion was not being advanced that Education Act cases were low priority, and it was repeated that prosecution was generally automatic, but several other factors which emerged cast doubt on the priority.

It seemed that the degree of seriousness perceived in relation to a case also depended on the age of the child, this suggesting that not only was the prosecution of older children unnecessary as their return to school was not legally enforceable, but that truancy at this stage was not a sufficiently serious problem to merit action. Truancy in a much younger child however was more serious.

The penalties for failure to secure attendance also bore out the minor nature of truancy in the eyes of the law. With a maximum fine of £50, the

fiscals were aware of the position of truancy in their overall remit:

*people expect us to prosecute - everybody wants everybody prosecuted, and we have to be realistic about what we can do, and we also have to be realistic in saying, well, for the whole public is it going to be worth spending our time and our staff?*

At one stage, Education Act cases were compared to Road Traffic Offences, in an attempt to highlight the simplicity of such decisions. This is particularly interesting in terms of the reliance by the Attendance Committees on this measure as the ultimate deterrent and the end of the line for truants. This notion of the low priority of truancy was in fact the focus of complaint of several attendance committee members, seeing this as allowing truancy to proceed unchecked.

### **The Warning Letter**

Although discussed as an option legally available to the Procurator Fiscal, this avenue was never used in Education Act cases, and most Procurator's Fiscal felt it would be inappropriate. Some awareness of the previous procedure was acknowledged and given as the reasons for the lack of this measure:

*Personally, I would have thought that if the Authorities had go to the stage of reporting it to the Procurator Fiscal, in general terms it means they've tried warnings. The parents have been well warned and I wouldn't have thought a warning from the Fiscal would make much difference.*

In general terms, these warnings would be considered for first offenders, but the previous behaviour of Education Act cases, a reflection of the multitude of previous procedures, makes the decision simply a choice

between prosecution and no proceedings.

### **The Decision to Prosecute**

In accordance with the decision to take no proceedings, it seemed the crucial factor here, too, was the age of the pupil. As seen, all those not prosecuted were the parents of children who had 1985 leaving dates. All those to be prosecuted had leaving dated of May 1986 and beyond, and the ages were as follows: 12,3; 14,0; 14,4; 13,11; 12,0; 14; 13; and 14.

Again the need appeared to be to force those pupils legally required to be in school to attend.

As suggested earlier, the Procurators Fiscal were anxious to state that generally cases would be prosecuted and that there was in practice little decision making taking place. Their main consideration was whether the child was still legally bound to be attending school in the foreseeable future, and having established this:

*basically we'd prosecute unless we had a very good reason not to.*

Other factors mentioned were again whether or not there were younger children in the family and the previous record of non-attendance of the child. It was again frequently stated that they had to accept that they were the last resort where other agencies had failed.

In practice, the importance of age and leaving date have been shown clearly. Siblings, however, did not appear to be crucial, as four of the six not prosecuted had brothers and sisters, but this was not mentioned in the



explanations given in relation to specific cases, in general the Procurator Fiscal suggesting that the decision was being made on the basis rather of the absence of a good reason (such as the leaving date) not to prosecute.

The history of previous procedures, also mentioned, in practice assumed only secondary importance. All 16 cases, whether prosecuted or not, had a history of previous procedures. By the nature of the truancy process this must be inevitable. In this respect, there appeared to be no significant differences between the two groups of cases, indeed four of the cases marked for no proceedings were breaches of Attendance Orders which had been imposed by the School Attendance Committee to act as a deterrent by making certain sanction should truancy recur. Two of the six cases also had a long family, as well as personal, history of truancy.

One of the May leavers (with 5 younger siblings) came from a family with a long record of poor attendance. The school and EWO reports documented a constant battle with the family for minimum attendance, and the parents reputedly made no effort. No proceedings were to be taken.

Certainly, similar histories were present in many of the families prosecuted but it seems that if this were indeed significant, the parents of those impending leavers who had been the subject of previous action would also have been prosecuted.

What appears to emerge from this consideration is that in substance, the 16 cases were essentially of a similar nature, and it seems reasonable to assume from the discussion that, in fact, all would normally involve prosecution but for the factor of the pupil's leaving date. This guided the final decision in all cases.

Although in the cases prosecuted other factors were mentioned, these simply justified a decision to prosecute. Many of the parents in both categories were reported to see education as a low priority, ignoring action taken against them, failing to turn up at Attendance Committees and generally disregarding previous intervention, but these factors were always taken rather as a means of supporting the apparently automatic decision to prosecute.

The central point appeared to be:

*whether there is a good reason not to*

and this good reason was overwhelmingly related to the age of the pupil concerned.

Sufficiency of evidence in truancy cases assumed less importance than perhaps in other cases, as a Headteacher's Certificate was proof of the offence. A reasonable excuse in law was generally illness of the child, and the onus was on the parent to prove this. It was suggested that when parents did give reasons what they were in fact giving were mitigating circumstances, in order to establish that they had been attempting to ensure attendance, but as the Procurator Fiscal pointed out:

*I'm a prosecutor, not a psychiatrist working out why children couldn't attend school and why it was unreasonable to expect them to.*

Unless there was reason to suspect that there was a reasonable excuse (in law) present, such considerations would be reserved for the arena of the court and would not apparently influence the decision.

## Court Cases

As prosecution of the parent marks the ultimate sanction for a school attendance case, a typical case will be described.

Such a typical case in the District Court involved either an appearance of the parent or a plea by letter. Generally the gallery would be filled with people awaiting disposal on a variety of charges with the Education Act cases being heard somewhere within the session. There was no separate session for this specific type of case.

When the case was called, the parent would stand before the Justice and the Clerk would establish that he/she was the named accused, read the charges and ask for a plea. With a guilty plea, the legal details of the case would then be read out. The Justice would then ask whether the parent had anything to say, the parent might offer some mitigating circumstances. The Justice would then make a decision. The whole process was brief, the proceedings formal and the general impression was one of a very minor and routine disposal.

It was pointed out by the Procurator Fiscal in discussion that most, if not all, Education Act cases would plead guilty. One Procurator Fiscal said she had seen only one trial in 7 years. In the 6 cases observed, 4 pleaded guilty immediately, one after changing his plea and one did not turn up. In this case the Procurator Fiscal requested and was granted a warrant for the parent's apprehension.

The disposals for the guilty pleas and the circumstances were as follows:

CASE 1 – This was the father of a girl who had been persistently absent. The father had consistently pled not guilty but failed to appear several times and had been fined for contempt. The Justice pointed out that the girl, according to reports, was being kept off to help at home and the father said that was her job. The Justice asked the father if he had anything to say and he offered nothing. He was fined £20 to pay at £5 per week.

CASE 2 – This was a guilty plea by letter. The extent of this disposal was for the Clerk to point out to the Justice that it was an Education Act case. The Justice quickly read the case papers and remarked: we'll be seeing her again. She was fined £20 with four weeks to pay.

CASE 3 – The child's mother appeared, as the father was in hospital. The mother immediately began to offer reasons for the offence and was stopped by the Justice, who pointed out to her that she was being charged with not having a reasonable excuse and he felt there was some confusion. This highlights the not guilty/mitigating circumstances confusion in Education Act cases. The decision was deferred for the father's appearance.

CASE 4 – In this case, the father was being charged in respect of two of his children. He was charged separately in respect of each child, pleading guilty to both charges. The Procurator Fiscal read from the school report that they were not progressing and the Justice asked the parent about this. The father claimed he was unaware of the truancy until recently (presumably relying on the Justice's lack of knowledge). The Justice then said it was the parents' legal responsibility to ensure the children attended, and the father was fined £20 in respect of each child.

CASE 5 – The child's father appeared and plead guilty. The Procurator

Fiscal read out that the child's attainment was not commensurate with the potential, and the Justice asked the father if he had anything to say. The father stated that he had had to go to live and work in another part of the country for a spell and the boy had been looked after by his granny. There was no further discussion and the father was fined £20.

Following this, as described earlier, the case would be over. Any further action would begin again at the school and progress through the School Attendance Committee channel (unless there was an Attendance Order on the parent). The purpose of the description of these cases was to highlight the routinisation of truancy at the level of the prosecution of parents.

## THE AGENCIES – An Overview

The situations found in the schools are repeated throughout the non-attendance process, whereby a variety of concerns influence the decision makers and a variety of responses are adopted which appear to be at best contradictory, at worst conflicting. The situation is parallel to that described by Garland and Young (1983) in the penal realm :

*it is not a singular, coherent unit. It is a complex network composed of a variety of different institutions, practices and relations supported by a number of agencies, capacities and discourses. The complex is made up of a multiplicity of different institutions... each of which has differential access to legal, jurisdictional, financial and other resources and each of which produces different penal and social effects. Each one of these institutions is, in turn, composed of a variety of different internal practices and procedures.*

Their subsequent point also applies with :

*each operating according to specific criteria and forms of calculation, on the basis of different forms of knowledge, training and expertise and with a variety of powers and objectives.*

In the conclusion, the competing responses identified will be summarised, before moving on to consider the implications of their existence and the problems raised.

## CHAPTER 12

## CONCLUSION

Having presented the findings of the study, it is necessary, finally, to return to the aims of the research, and what becomes clear from the preceding analysis is that the main responses to non-attendance coexist in practice.

The two main responses, the traditional/corrective approach and the liberal/welfare approach are predominant in the process of managing truancy. The laissez faire response is also significant in some of the agencies' responses. By contrast, it is interesting to note that the "educational reform" response is ignored. Truancy is not, at any stage, seen to be an "educational" problem.

It is useful at this stage to summarise briefly the main findings in terms of each type of response.

**The Traditional Response**

This was the predominant response in two of the schools (Birchwood and Bayview), three School Attendance Committees (Birchwood, Oakbank and Ashdale) and amongst the Procurators Fiscal. The assumptions on which such a response is based (outlined in Chapter 1) were readily identifiable : the concern with the majority of pupils (seen to be willing to attend and to learn); the concern to enforce the legal requirement of school attendance and, particularly in the schools and attendance committees, the academic focus and the stress on traditional school values.

For pupils who failed to attend, this was translated into a response which relied on the use of deterrence (threat of further action) and sanction

(the use of punitive or what were perceived to be punitive means). Within the schools, little time was spent with the truanting pupils, and in all bodies, a relatively standardised response had developed, which took little account of individual circumstances. Contact which did take place with the pupils (in schools and at attendance committees) was unfamiliar and authoritarian, the stress on the consequences of persisting with the behaviour.

In terms of the perceived causes of truancy, there was a general tendency to apportion blame rather than examine external causes, thus rooting the behaviour in deliberate law breaking on the part of the pupil, parent or both. This preoccupation with discovering who was "at fault" guided the action particularly of the three school attendance committees. Any home causes, therefore, were viewed as being restricted to the attitude of the family and related to a perception of low standards of behaviour, lack of firm control and lack of discipline. The assumption that was made pupils and parents who did not adhere to the law relating to compulsory education were making a deliberate choice.

Decisions taken, as seen, were usually guided by the "severity" of the "offence" (the length of the truancy), particularly at the school stage, and the agencies' perceptions of the pupil's willingness in the future to conform and attend. The agencies involved were seen to impose increasingly severe threats in an attempt to coerce the pupils back to a return to regular attendance. The process was one of visible sanctions, isolating the non-attenders as a small minority of deviant pupils and deviant families and necessitating the use of punitive measures.

In terms of the identification of the agencies' remits in Chapter 2, it seems the three school attendance committees and the Procurators Fiscal



respond, in terms of their general orientation and philosophy, in a way which accords with the concerns of the legislation guiding their actions. Both are, as seen, governed by the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, and have the apparent purpose of enforcing the law by dealing primarily with the imposition of sanctions. This implied the use of punishment through the formal means identified, to stress to the parents their responsibility in relation to attendance.

These school attendance committees also used this "traditional" response more frequently in direct relation to the pupils rather than the parents, relating their sanctions to the youngsters themselves, and focussing on their attitudes rather than those of their parents. It is clear, therefore, that despite the apparent commitment within the legislation to dealing exclusively with pupils through welfare means (through the Social Work [Scotland] Act 1968), these committees also became involved with the young people and employed corrective measures to discipline the pupils (rather than their parents). Their interpretation of their role, therefore, creates this apparent distortion of the legislative purpose, exemplified by their attempted use of the Children's Hearing System as a punitive resource.

Thus, in this way, although not departing from their expected orientation, the committees have expanded their role to include focussing on pupils. The two school guidance departments (Birchwood and Portobello), however, provide clear examples of a complete mismatch between the apparent functions of the "conventional wisdom" and their practical responses.

As seen in Chapter 2, guidance departments (in contrast to the attendance committees and Procurators Fiscal) formed part of the welfare network, responding to the pupils and attempting to isolate and solve their problems, acknowledging home difficulties and providing the most appropriate

solution. This should have meant they responded in terms of the "Liberal" model. Interestingly, this was the approach the majority of staff presented at interview, although in practice, the evidence pointed to the opposing approach. Best et al (1983) argue, however, that this too relates to the image of the school and the need to present a positive picture to prospective parents :

*headteachers and senior staff have a vested interest in portraying their school as a caring institution because their own public image and therefore to some extent their self image depends in no small measure on the evaluation which the public at large make of the institution for which they are responsible.*

In these two schools, in practice, these welfare personnel were invoking the authority and discipline of the traditional approach. It is clear that, in their cases, as Best et al conclude :

*there are substantial differences between the pastoral care of the conventional wisdom and what it means for teachers who supposedly provide it in some institutionalised form,*

This highlights the difference between ideology and practice and provides an example of the use of discretion providing the opportunity to reinterpret their remit in the light of their own values.

### **The Liberal Response**

Conversely, the other two schools (Ashdale and Oakbank) one attendance committee (Bayview), the Reporter's Department and the Children's Hearing System operated what constituted a liberal/welfare response. The assumptions identified differed correspondingly : the predominant stress was on the individual family and the need to promote a return to school in the pupils' best interests"; and on the perceived needs of the pupils; and attempts here made to direct the families to help and "treatment" in order to alleviate

their difficulties.

The welfare response, for these groups, relied on the use of measures presented as proving the most appropriate form of "help" in order to allow the pupils to benefit from the experience of school attendance. This involved attempting to isolate "problems" (home difficulties, frequently related to deprivation and disadvantage), through an examination of the family's background circumstances, in order to assess the causes of non-attendance. Truancy was viewed as indicative of these difficulties and seen to require sympathy and understanding.

All these agencies, therefore had a greater degree of direct contact with the pupils, (except the Reporters who were largely concerned with the referral process), each attempting to examine the circumstances of the pupils. Decisions were taken on the basis of this type of "diagnosis".

Although this welfare response was the primary concern of these groups, however, this apparent approach embodied assumptions which apparently necessitated in some cases, the use of methods more usually associated with the traditional response.

Despite the differing philosophical orientation, the schools and Children's Hearings relied on the use, for some of the pupils, of the type of threat and sanction previously outlined. Examples of this were clear, particularly in the schools' means of isolating "types" of truant to guide their actions. The "less serious" truants, for whom no home problems could be found were being "told off" and their parents referred to the School Attendance committee for deterrent/law enforcement reasons.

Although it was maintained that these pupils constituted a minority,

with more serious truancy always located in severe background problems, evidence of an attempt to distinguish between those families in need of (or deserving of) help and those who were deliberately law breaking was clear. Similarly, in the Children's Hearings, although the consideration of individual cases was based on welfare concerns, the use of threat of formal action (through adjournment) and the use of compulsory measures of care as sanctions were identified, particularly for pupils who did not exhibit home problems. This provides an additional dimension to the interpretation of the welfare response.

In terms of the likely responses identified in Chapter 2, Ashdale and Oakbank approached their dealings with truanting pupils in terms of the "conventional wisdom" of guidance. Both these schools demonstrated flexibility in their organisational arrangements, to acknowledge the contribution of some (limited) school factors to already existing home difficulties. Contact with the pupils was frequent and knowledge more thorough than in those operating traditional methods, referrals to other agencies based largely on the perception of a need for further input of help. Alongside this, however, as seen was a disciplinary function (which the staff argued was justifiable in terms of the welfare philosophy, as there were no problems to address). The differences between these schools and the preceding two were clear both in terms of their approaches and the overall values and assumptions within the schools with less focus here on school "image", examination success and the effects of truancy on their pupils.

Bayview Attendance Committee provided an example of a departure from the apparent traditional functions of these bodies. The committee interpreted their role as one of dealing with pupils (rather than the legislative

prescription of enforcing the responsibilities the parents), but functioned as a welfare agency rather than a law enforcement body. This committee had arranged its operation around the collection of information, assessment of individual cases and referral for help rather than stressing the responsibility of the parents. Again this represents a differing interpretation of its role in the management of truancy. A further factor to emerge from this is the difference between the schools and their associated attendance committees. Only Birchwood school and attendance committee both operated a "traditional" response. There was a differing interpretations of the purpose of referral in Oakbank and Ashdale (welfare based schools with traditional attendance committees), and in Bayview (a traditional school with a welfare based attendance committee). Clearly the response at each stage depended on the philosophy of the individual agency rather than any overall approach.

Finally, the Reporter's Department, Children's Hearings and Panel members operated largely with the philosophy of the legislation by which they were governed. As with schools, however, the absence of identifiable home problems within a family created a problem in terms of their dealings with truantiing pupils. Such cases were seen as inappropriate for welfare measures, and again both sanction and deterrent became the practical machanisms for attempting to return these pupils to school. These pupils without home problems, however, (as in Ashdale and Oakbank), were seen to constitute a minority, reflecting the associated theoretical assumption that deprivation and delinquency or deviance are inextricably linked.

### **The Laissez-Faire Response**

Although the traditional and welfare responses were the predominant categories by which the actions and decisions could be explained, for some

pupils, the reaction to their non-attendance was a *laissez faire* response. In Chapter 1, this approach was associated with criticisms of schools in terms of their irrelevance for the pupils, and with criticisms of the traditional and welfare responses seen to constitute mechanisms of control. In practice, however, the identification of these views did not relate to evidence of the existence of a more radical theoretical orientation, rather to the constraints of the non-attendance process.

In the schools, firstly, the *laissez faire* response was identified in relation particularly to S4 leavers who had begun to truant prior to their leaving dates. Both the traditional and liberal schools felt little could be done to return these pupils. In Birchwood and Bayview, the assumption was made that the formal punitive measures could not be followed through in the time available, negating the deterrent function. (Bayview did, however, make an example of the "worst" leavers, by referring them en masse to the school attendance committee). Oakbank and Ashdale made some attempt to "invite" the pupils to careers interviews and encourage them to attend, but the underlying assumption related to the notion that this truancy was not based on causes requiring treatment. This is somewhat closer to an acknowledgement that the school experience may be of little benefit to these pupils, but it was felt to be a mistaken assumption on their part (the argument frequently presented that employers, faced with the choice of an attender or a non-attender, the former would be selected). School attendance committees, of both orientations, disliked impending leaver referrals for similar reasons. The three traditional committees felt punitive measures would be futile, as by the time the cases reached later stages, the agencies would take no action. However, these committees felt the action may serve as an example to others. In Bayview, however, (paradoxically the school which attempted to provide a

visible deterrent), there was a notion that these pupils would not benefit from the resources available. Although they felt the pupils should be encouraged to attend, there was also an assumption that there was little they could do to promote this.

The Reporter's Department and children's panels reflected similar concerns. As seen, there was an unease with dealing with those pupils for whom home based causes could not be isolated, and impending leavers tended to be dismissed. As in other welfare oriented bodies, it was felt that although their behaviour was "irresponsible", there was little to be done. The fact that such cases reached the Reporter's Department is indicative of the length of time taken in some cases, who may not, when the truancy began, have been be impending leavers.

For the Procurators Fiscal, the adoption of such a response was based on the need to identify priorities (because of organisational constraints such as pressure on court time). As with the traditional schools, the response was based on the associated notion that the parents of such pupils would be admonished in court, although they did not feel the deterrent to others may have been useful.

What becomes clear from the evidence of this response, however, is that the agencies reacted to situational constraints, and did not base their actions on any challenge to the basic assumption of the overall benefit of school based education.

### **The Educational Reform Response**

This response, seen to be most closely related to the criticisms of education outlined in Chapter 1, was not found in practice, as has become

clear from the data. Although in some instances the schools did attempt to make curricular changes, the school system remained generally unchallenged, this view neglected. This will be discussed later.

### **Implications**

The first major conclusion to be drawn, from this identification of the responses, relates to the starting point of the investigation and the use of discretion. What has emerged is a means of dealing with truancy reflecting the assumptions and values of the agencies involved at differing stages, rather than any clear, consistent approach to the non-attendance process. Although "response types" can be identified from the legislation and literature, which as stated, imply that pupils will be dealt with (in school guidance departments and children's hearings) through a needs based welfare response, and parents (at the School Attendance Committee and in court) by a more correctional response, what emerges is the opportunity for agencies to alter these aims to correspond with their own values and perceptions of non-attendance. Some of those involved have more discretion than others (guidance departments having a particularly unconstrained choice of action; attendance committees and hearing a substantial amount of discretion although less than the schools, and the Procurator Fiscal more constrained). All however have some freedom to decide and what emerges is that schools vary between welfare, punishment and uneasy combinations of the two. Attendance committees similarly vary (and may be at odds with their associated schools); Children's Hearings selectively use a combination of responses and the Procurator Fiscal and courts respond to other (for them) important factors.

In such a situation, the purpose becomes unclear – some pupils and parents are being sanctioned and punished, others "helped", yet others



ignored. There is no clear view of the causes of truancy and no shared view of appropriate solutions. The experience of families may vary at different stages in the process depending on the groups of personnel they encounter. Cohen (1983) summed this up, in relation to the penal process, as having :

*consequences so different from intentions; policies carried out for reasons opposite to the stated ideologies;; the same ideologies supporting quite different policies; the same policy supported for quite different ideological reasons.*

There is little logical connection between different stages of the process, nor within particular stages between the ideologies involved, the policies pursued and the actions undertaken.

### **The Conflict**

The two predominant ideologies, as the study has shown, are those of welfare and correction. The coexistence of the two views, and the legislative provision allowing both to find expression creates the situation whereby the use of discretion in practice appears to result in :

*arbitrariness, unfairness, inconsistency and injustice (Adler and Asquith 1980)*

The lack of clarity in purpose both within and between agencies has become apparent throughout, with the families involved being dealt with by that method which best accords with the views of the particular body to which they have been referred. The outcome for the family will depend more on (a) the school the pupil attends and its ideological focus, and (b) the subsequent referrals and the beliefs of those involved, than on any coherent notion of the best means to deal with the non-attendance. This surely raises cause for concern, given the powers available to the agencies which may have a significant effect on both pupil and parent. Decisions involving punishing

pupils, prosecuting parents, perhaps removing the pupil from home should surely be based on a more coherent policy and a more consistent response. Even at a less serious level, it would seem that the pupils within a school should have some protection from the often arbitrary methods of the guidance department. The same argument can be applied throughout the process.

One of the main contributory factors to the extent of the problem is the coexistence of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 and the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968, and the perennial difficulty of combining welfare and punishment within a single system for dealing with the same problem. The difficulty of reconciling the two has been well documented in relation to juvenile justice (Morris and McIsaac 1978) and as Asquith (1983) states :

*The difficulty of resolving the conceptual ambiguity of a welfare and a judicial ideology finds institutional expression in most systems of justice for children.*

The non-attendance process, although involving adults, too, highlights a similar situation, as both ideologies are seen to be applied to both groups by different bodies at various stages.

### **Implications**

The expression of these views necessitates a return to the starting point of the study, the existence of discretion. As Davis (1971) states :

*where law ends, discretion begins, and the exercise of discretion may mean either beneficence or tyranny, either justice or injustice, either reasonableness or arbitrariness.*

He further states :

*every truth extolling discretion may be matched by a truth about its dangers. Discretion is a tool only when properly used; like an axe, it can be a weapon for mayhem or murder. In a government of men and of laws, the portion that is a government of men, like a malignant cancer, often tends to stifle that portion which is a*

*government of laws.*

In relation to similar ideological conflict within juvenile justice, the perceived solution has frequently been viewed as the need for a removal of the discretionary element, the return to strict rules governing action to be taken and thus the imposition of a clear response to the emergent behaviour. Whatever the suggested solution, the existence of the discretion has been the central difficulty. As Bean (1976) states :

*no doubt the debate has, and will always be about the amount of discretion available. Where the rules are clearly formulated and where sentences are determined by those rules, the system becomes inflexible. Conversely, where there are rules which permit discretion, the system produces powerful groups able to stamp their authority on that discretionary area.*

The chosen solution, as with all such decisions, will also depend on the beliefs, values and assumptions of those charged with the policy choice. This is an intractable problem founded in considerations outwith the scope of this study, and which permeates every decision in which a choice is involved. Bearing this in mind, however, the alternative solutions must be considered.

There are essentially two possible means of lessening the inconsistency in the non-attendance process. One is to attempt to hammer out basic principles (Bean 1976) and adopt, at least at a philosophical level, either one of the welfare or punitive approaches. The second is to minimise the availability of discretion and thereby remove some of the "injustice" of differential treatment. In fact, there is an overlap between the two possibilities. Such a return to a rule based system is often seen to imply a punitive response as Asquith (1983) points out :

*the advocacy of children's rights and of punishment are in fact in terms of the justice movement, conceptually linked; only in a system in which children are punished for what they have done can the rights best be protected.... Accordingly, the main proponents of the justice movement include amongst their principles the proposal that measures should be determinate, proportional (to the offence) and consistent (with other offences)... An unashamedly retributivist philosophy underpinning a legally and judicially oriented form of decision making is seen as the most appropriate.*

Correspondingly, a welfare based philosophy is more usually associated with the availability of discretion. The implications of basing the system on either welfare or punishment must now be considered.

### **A Punitive Approach**

The possibility exists, theoretically, for a move to a rule-based system either for the first reason suggested (basic agreement that this is the single best means to deal with "offending") or as a result of the second possibility (the attempt to remove discretion).

As outlined in Chapter 1, this would involve clearly defined procedures and proscribed responses to non-attendance, satisfying both those arguing that the behaviour is rooted in choice and responsibility and should be sanctioned and deterred, and those who advocate a "return to justice" (Morris et al 1980). The "rights" of children would thereby be protected by the availability of legal safeguards often absent in "treatment" approaches (Martin, Fox and Murray 1981).

In terms of non-attendance this would clearly involve a reappraisal of the role of guidance departments (although not, in some cases, in practical changes in operation) and would challenge the role of the Children's Hearing System.

At a broader theoretical level, this would challenge the views of the

welfare philosophy. The large body of research pointing to home/environment causes of truancy (as outlined in the Introduction) would be ignored in the need to fail to recognise the effects of external circumstances. As Rutter and Giller point out :

*It is evident that an exclusively crime control or justice approach, in which serious crimes result in strong punishment, ignores the extensive evidence that severe and persistent delinquency is often accompanied by widespread personal difficulties and disturbance which give rise to distress and social impairment for the individual.*

An additional difficulty, as Reid (1986) points out relates to the situation where :

*unfortunately, very little is known about the advantages and disadvantages of punishing truants*

and where :

*despite legislative changes in Britain, many experts believe that the issue of penalising truants has never been successfully resolved.*

Galloway (1985) further questions the effectiveness of such a solution

*teachers and magistrates who see legal sanctions as the solution to the problem of poor attendance might be more happily occupied in search of the Holy Grail.*

Finally, in terms of the effects of such implications of the legislation, it seems that not only would such a move challenge the nature of school guidance and the Children's Hearing System, but there may also be

implications for educational provision. Such a change in emphasis would imply that :

*children are to be treated in the main as responsible for their behaviour (Asquith 1983).*

If this were to be the underlying assumption, it seems this may also remove the justification for the punishment of parents for failing to secure attendance, shifting the responsibility for education to the pupils themselves. This would seem to challenge the paternalistic considerations which underly the provision of education and the associated legislation existing at present, as children would explicitly be dealt with punitively, requiring a re-examination of the status of children in society.

#### **A Welfare Approach**

There would be no justification for a move to a wholly welfare approach in terms of arguments for a return to justice. Indeed a welfare-based standpoint is inextricably linked to the existence of discretion (with its emphasis on individualised decisions and individualised justice). However, it could be argued that this approach should be the sole means of dealing with non-attendance, and if adopted by all participants would lead to a more caring and "individual" response to non-attendance. The scale of the difficulties of agencies reaching such a consensus, however, have been highlighted by the findings of this research suggesting the dangers of the reinterpretation of the model at a practical level. As Galloway (1986) states :

*the ethos of each professional group makes active cooperation very difficult indeed (Galloway 1986)*

thus :

*complexity and contradiction between them is every bit as probable as coherence and cohesion. (Garland and Young 1983)*

If such a welfare model were to underpin the entire process for dealing with truantiing pupils, the punitive elements would also have to be correspondingly removed. Guidance Departments and attendance committees would be removed from the disciplinary process, allowing consideration only of the circumstances of the pupils and the most appropriate treatment. The question remains as to whether this would lead to practical change in action or merely more inconsistently used discretion.

Further problems relate to the possibility that those who receive the help may in fact see this as punishment (perhaps compounded by the possibility of agencies openly presenting it in these terms, as has occurred in the non-attendance process).

The adoption of a welfare based solution also implies the need for a range of resources to accomodate differing individual circumstances. As seen, in practice, the solutions available to the participants are limited.

Finally, a wholly welfare based approach questions the existence of punitive measures for the parents of the truantiing pupils. Given that it has been argued that welfare and punishment involve essentially incompatible assumptions it would be difficult to reconcile the acceptance of legitimate home/environment causes of truancy with the ascription of deliberate choice and responsibility to other family members, the parents, presumably affected by the same circumstances. If it is accepted that the causes of truancy relate to deprivation, it becomes inconsistent to blame the parents by virtue of their status under the law. Again this would involve a reexamination of the legal provision and overhaul of the system of prosecution.

## Summary

Both these extremes clearly involve problems, the nature of which are dependent on the view of non-attendance which is adopted. It seems, as Cohen (op cit) suggests :

*If one side is like the child who believes that fairy stories are actually true and those who tell them always good, the other side is like the adult who laboriously tries to prove that fairy stories are not really true and that those who tell them are always bad.*

In actual fact :

*Most of the time there will be incongruence, lack of fit, contradictions, paradoxes.*

In practice, it appears the question must remain as to whether, even given a clear legislative statement, it would be possible to have a system of justice without their coexistence.

## An Alternative View

Finally, however, it may be useful to return to the theoretical position adopted at the outset and to reconsider the notion that there exist in fact other possible responses to truancy, shown to be neglected in the practical operation of the agencies. The two main approaches have been apparent and their implications considered. Alongside their use was evidence of some laissez faire for pragmatic reasons. The alternative view of schooling, the view of schools as systems of social control, found no expression in the reported beliefs or practical actions of those involved. The associated responses, the view of truancy as rational action and the calls for a re-examination of education found no voice in the agencies. As discussed earlier, the underlying



assumption accepted by all participants was that essentially schools and compulsory education in traditional or liberal form were both necessary and desirable.

Perhaps the final question to pose in relation to the management of truancy is whether this process which has been identified :

*serves the school as an institution or serves the pupil? (Best et al 1983)*

It can be argued, from the means used in dealing with non-attendance, that the overall effect of the combination of techniques used and the lack of clarity in their use, is to make their response to truancy one of control and coercion, returning to the argument outlined in Chapter 1 (in relation to radical views of schooling) and suggesting that the predominant aim is one of maximisation of adherence to the law and the minimisation of deviance and non-conformity.

The use of traditional methods, firstly, can be criticised from this standpoint as involving the overt use of coercion to force pupils to submit and conform to the values of the education system. Such an approach apparently isolates a group of pupils and type of family whose attitudes are indicative of the need to punish and reform, and who fail to acknowledge the benefits of the education system. There is no attempt to provide a solution for the individuals, who will be excluded from the perceived group of good families and will constitute a nuisance to the schools. The broad assumption, in relation to the parents, made by this approach, can be called into question, as Marland (1982) suggests :

*thus the common phrases 'cooperative parents' or 'supportive*

*parents' are usually synonyms for 'parents who see things our way'.....so the good parent is one who agrees and supports (the school).*

The traditional response can thus be viewed as an attempt to enforce the values of the school on the pupils.

Such a response, when overt, visible and presented as such, can be criticised in these terms, the School Attendance Committees accepting that the values of the school (hard work, authority and discipline) should be upheld and promoted, the Procurator Fiscal demanding that the law be enforced. Pupils dealt with by the three identifiably traditional attendance committees were overtly subjected to this. Such a response, when presented as a welfare approach can be further criticised. As seen in these schools, the situation suggested by Fletcher (op cit), whereby :

*there is difficulty for guidance of coming to terms with the authoritarian tradition of Scottish schools*

is apparent, and as Johnson (op cit) points out :

*many of the resources put into pastoral care seem to be devoted to the smooth running of the school as an institution.*

This situation is what Best et al (op cit) term :

*a serious mismatch between theory and reality,*

between the conventional wisdom of guidance and the reality, between the schools' pronouncements and practices and between what teachers claim to mean by pastoral care and their day to day dealings with pupils. Thus, in the traditional schools :

*there exists among teachers and others an unofficial version of pastoral care which stands in stark contrast to the official version.  
(Best et al 1983)*

the effect being further evidence of the control of pupils as well as parents, in a system :

*less concerned with the problems of pupil welfare than with the problems of social control and administrative convenience.*

The welfare response, however, also appeared to a significant extent in practice to be concerned to foster in the families an acceptance of the need for school attendance, providing a less overt form of social control. This tension between the pastoral/ welfare role and the need to enforce order has been discussed by Johnson(op cit), (in this case in relation to EWOs) :

*the most frequently expressed tension is that between the duty to enforce the law regarding regular school attendance and the requirement to attend to the welfare of all pupils.*

This tension suggests the criticism that these welfare systems, too, meet the needs of the institution rather than the pupils. In terms of the effect on the recipients, and the eventual disposals, the difference between punishment and treatment may be only one of method, the outcomes and effects essentially similar.

Williamson (1980) highlights this as follows :

*that pastoralisation is a special structural device essential to reduce resentment is a necessary condition of our present system of education,*

suggesting that the goal of inducing conformity is reflected in the division of pupils based on the notion that those who receive help are those who will accept the academic rules and are willing to attempt to conform. This was certainly reflected in the need to ascertain a willingness to return to school before this approach would be employed (particularly in the schools and

hearings).

The attribution of the causes of truancy in this approach to home based problems may also be seen to be a reflection of the values and assumptions of those involved, as the benefits of school (in the views of the decision makers) have been seen to be repeatedly pointed out to such pupils with the value of the school experience providing the background against which to view the problems. Discussions incorporated elements of moral disapproval, giving further support to the notion that the need to change the families may be an attempt to foster what are seen to be desirable social attitudes and conformity. As Morris et al (op cit) suggest (in relation to children's hearings) :

*intervention carries a severe risk of saving children from families who merely have different lifestyles from dominant conceptions of appropriate child rearing.*

Certainly, those pupils who were seen to reject these values became the most prominent recipients of welfare sanctions. There was an inability or unwillingness to challenge these assumptions and a failure to view the situation in terms of the wider structural factors alluded to in Chapter 1.

#### **Policy Implications : Two Levels of Action**

In practical terms, there seem to be two possible levels of change to incorporate some of the preceding problems. These will be outlined briefly, as clearly any attempt at solution would involve a much larger examination of practices. Both types of action also imply a willingness to alter the situation on the part of the participants, which must be questionable.

However, at the most basic level, it seems some attempt could

realistically be made to facilitate communication between the parties involved, thereby forcing them to examine the basis of their decisions or at least to acknowledge this. It may appear overly simplistic to propose such action in the face of the complexity of the choices made, but the marked lack of understanding of the roles and objectives of each group by the others concerned suggests that even this type of change would make some (albeit small) practical difference to the pupils involved.

Joint action (both within and between groups may go some way to promoting understanding and more coherent objectives. At worst, some of the more apparent contradictions could perhaps be eradicated. Through such cooperation between schools, schools and Attendance Committees, the Reporter and the Procurator Fiscal and the education bodies (it may be possible to raise awareness of good practice and bring to light some of the problems identified. This appears to be the only feasible short term action without involving legislative change.

However, as has been argued throughout this final chapter, such action fails to meet the challenge of tackling the basic acceptance of education in schools as adequate and satisfactory and fails to address the broader structural questions raised. "Tinkering" with the present system in this way will do little more than at best make the pupils' treatment or punishment more consistently inappropriate.

Thus, at a wider level, the second approach (clearly in the present climate more idealistic and less likely) requires examination of :

*structured inequality in power and interest that underpin the processes where the laws are created and enforced. (Taylor, Walton & Young 1974)*

If, as must be the final assumption of this study, the management of truancy is primarily an exercise in control, it is then necessary to extricate considerations of the responses to truancy from the unquestioning belief in the value of the school system, and to consider that :

*forcing unwilling pupils back into an unchanged system is a recipe for frustration and resentment. (Galloway 1986)*

The much-neglected approach of the examination of alternative views of schooling should thus be given voice in relation to considerations of the broader context of education, the subordinate position of many of the pupils, the dependency created and the conformity required to succeed. This should also include examination of these "disaffected" pupils' accounts of their experience of schooling and their perceptions of their reasons for refusal to participate. Rather than assuming a congruent fit, it is past time to consider that the "values" of schools and pupils may be sometimes contradictory, often conflicting.

From such considerations may emerge alternative conceptions of the optimum structure for education. Perhaps the suggestions of White (1980) and Grunsell (1980) should be given credence in this context, with experimentation in "free schools", "work experience" and a variety of alternative forms of provision. The resultant approach, in the view of these critics might then accomodate some of the at present stifled cultural diversity, thus making the process more relevant to those pupils who find little stimulation in the present system.

Without ending on too great a note of pessimism, the prospect of such a critical re-examination seems a little unlikely, standing in direct

opposition to notions of compulsory testing and a core curriculum. It is only to be hoped that the more visible and problematic the anomalies become, the less the inconsistencies can be overlooked. Unfortunately, however, even given a receptive political climate, a further obstacle must form the concluding comments.

### **Changing the "Worlds" – A Cautionary Note**

Having outlined these possible courses of action it is necessary to end with a return to the assertions of Chapter 1, which formed the background to the examination of the decision process. The concept of the "assumptive world" was introduced as a means of understanding the choices, and has indeed been shown to be of relevance in this case in the areas of deviance and education. The above suggestions imply a need to rethink these "assumptive worlds" to give consideration to conflicting ideologies.

The "assumptive worlds" identified, despite their inter-agency differences have, on the whole, remained fairly consistent within the agencies, and there are clearly organisational and social aspects of the situation which add a further dimension to the aspects in need of change. Any attempt to influence the process would clearly be inadequate should it fail to take account of these factors. Some attempt must therefore be made to account for this relative homogeneity of belief and action within each group, based on the accordant situations of the actors.

Given the nature of this thesis and the data collected, such an attempt at understanding can only be speculative, but its influence must be acknowledged. Although there may be many hidden factors, some of the important situational features can be implied from the analytical chapters.

To take each agency in turn, therefore, it seems likely that the differences in schools can at least be partly understood by considering their respective catchment areas. As was clear, Oakbank and Ashdale operated broadly "welfare" policies, Bayview and Birchwood more punitive. Both of the former schools were located in "deprived" catchment areas, perhaps influencing the extent of the truancy and its "visibility" and also creating a greater awareness of the sorts of social problems frequently used to explain and justify the welfare approach.

In the other two schools there was a largely "problem free" environment where staff perhaps found it simpler to assume that few or no environmental difficulties were to be found. Related to this, as was suggested in the data chapters, parental choice legislation was clearly an important constraint for the operation of staff in these schools, anxious to project a trouble free image.

The recruitment or self selection of staff may also have been a factor, as many of the staff at Oakbank and Ashdale had been attracted to pastoral care as much as to teaching, whereas, in general, the staff at Bayview and Birchwood were attracted by "good schools" and academic excellence. Add to this strong AHTs (guidance) in both schools and the overall policy becomes yet more understandable.

Within the other bodies, similar explanations of the maintenance of the identified assumptions must also be sought, with the need to address the reasons for Bayview Attendance Committee's welfare approach standing in direct contrast to the other schools'. The answer is not to be found in the parent/teacher combination of members as might be most readily suggested, as Ashdale was punitive and parent dominated. (Again, speculatively, the



explanation appeared to lie in the individuals concerned, with a chairperson particularly committed to the welfare approach, two like minded EWOs and a social worker, all of whom were prepared to ignore the demands of the school staff and their EWO to a great extent.) A similarly vociferous chairperson dominated Ashdale, with its more controlling approach, these two individuals accounting for much of the differences in parent bodies. The other two committees may have been affected by the preponderance of teaching staff and the determined EWO input.

The focus among the Reporters must in part be due to the clear philosophy of the children's hearing system and the commitment of those recruited to the overall tasks. However, it was argued that where a more controlling function was identified, the Reporters were also found to be responding to demands from other parties for action and the pressure being exerted by the schools to produce results and examples. The panel members' more overt control can be seen to be in part a response to perhaps overlapping social roles (parent/teacher/community member etc) and perhaps in part a response to the lack of resources and realistic alternatives available to them (particularly as seen in Chapter 9 when no home based problems could be identified).

Finally, in the case of the Procurator Fiscal, it has been argued that pressure of time and resources available again played a part in the emergent decision (with the attempt to predict the likely ensuing action or lack thereof). Administrative concerns such as the number and nature of other cases would also establish the relative priority of truancy.

The above considerations are not intended to provide an extensive list of those factors which account for the differences between agencies and

the similarities within them. The central theme of the study has been to consider the ideological views of the actors and to examine their relation to the responses. This has been demonstrated and alternative means of proceeding suggested. However, the above discussion serves to highlight that changing ideology and philosophy (even if were possible) cannot be seen to be sufficient without taking account of the plethora of other factors described above. To change the practices and consequences of non-attendance decisions requires a thorough understanding of all component parts of the "assumptive worlds" to include the less visible, less measurable aspects.

The thesis must therefore conclude with these factors in mind. Once all the aspects can be understood:

*"what the outside observer then sees is the mediator 'behaving' more or less consistently in accordance with an ideology or set of values which make situational sense." (Young, 1980)*

What is clear is that:

*"the problem for central policy makers becomes one of deploying instruments and influence to achieve desired ends"*

and these must consider both the philosophies and the factors which shape and support the philosophies of the actors. The final assertion, however, must be that this is long overdue, as pupils in receipt of either welfare or punitive responses become:

*"used to being the victims of decisions which seemed arbitrary and grossly unfair." (Grunsell, 1980)*

There must be a departure from the situation where :

*decision making processes in formal proceedings used against truants and disrupters are both characterised by their variance, an idiosyncrasy which often borders on injustice to the eyes of untrained observers. (Reid 1985)*

The overall conclusion must be that critical re-examination, taking more account of questioning of basic assumptions underlying the non-attendance process, is clearly necessary to begin to address some of the problems which have emerged.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ACKROYD, S and HUGHES, J.A. (1981) : Data collection in Context, Longman, London
- ACTON, H.B. (1969) : The Philosophy of Punishment, MacMillan, London
- ADLER, M. and ASQUITH, S. (1980) : Discretion and Welfare, Heinemann, London
- APPLE, M. (1982) : Education and Power, Routledge and Kegan Paul, Boston
- APPLE, M. (1979) : The Production of Knowledge and the Production of Deviance in Schools - in Barton and Meighan (eds)
- ASQUITH, S. (1983) : Children and Justice, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh
- AULD, R. (1976) : Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the William Tyndale School, Inner London Education Authority, London
- BANKOWSKI, Z. and NELKIN, D. (1980) : Discretion as a Social Problem - in Adler and Asquith (eds)
- BARTON, L. and MEIGHAN, R. (eds) (1979) : Schools, Pupils and Deviance, Nafferton Books, London
- BEAN, P. (1976) : Rehabilitation and Deviance, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London
- BECKER, H.S. (1958) : Problems of inference and proof in participant observation - in American Sociological Review, 23, 6
- BENN, S.I. and PETERS, R.S. (1959) : Social Principles and the Democratic State, Allen and Unwin, London
- BERTHOLD, R. and BROWN, J.C. (1981) : Poverty and the Development of Anti Poverty policy in the United Kingdom, Heinemann Educational Books, London
- BEST, R., JARVIS, C. and RIBBINS, P. (eds) (1980) : Perspectives on Pastoral Care, Heinemann Educational Books, London
- BEST, R., RIBBINS, P., JARVIS, C. and ODDY, D. (1983) : Education and Care, Heinemann Educational Books,

London

BILLINGTON, B.J. (1979) : Truants - some personality characteristics in Durham and Newcastle Research Review, 9, 43

BOTTOMLEY, A.K. (1973) : Decisions in the Penal Process, Martin Robinson, London

BOYSON, R.H. (1973) : Order and Purpose - in Turner (ed)

BOYSON, R.H. (1974) : The Need for Realism - in Turner (ed)

BRIDGES, D and SCRIMSHAW, P (1975) : Values and Authority in Schools, Hodder and Stoughton, London

BROOKS, R. (1973) : The Right Relationship - in Turner (ed)

BRUCE, N and SPENCER, J. (1976) : Face to Face With Families, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh

BURGESS, R.G. (1982) : Field Research, Allen and Unwin, London

BURGESS, R.G. (1984) : In the Field, Allen and Unwin, London

BURNHILL, P. (1985) : The Unwilling Apparatus for an Educational Experiment, Unpublished paper, University of Edinburgh

BUTTON, L (1980) : Perspectives on Pastoral Care - in Best et al (eds)

CAMPBELL, T. (1983) : The Left and Rights, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London

CAMPBELL, T. (1978) : Discretionary Rights - in Timms and Watson (eds)

CARLIN, P. and COLLISON, M. (1980) : Radical Issues in Criminology, Martin Robinson, Oxford

CARSON, W.G. and WILES, P. (1971) : Crime and Delinquency in Britain, Martin Robinson, Oxford

COHEN, S. (1983) : Social Control Talk - in Garland and Young (eds)

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PERSONS (SCOTLAND)  
Cmmd 2306, HMSO, London

CORRIGAN, P. (1979) : Schooling the Smash Street Kids, MacMillan and Co, London

COULBY, D and HARPER, T (1985) : Preventing Classroom Disruption, Croom Helm, London

CRAFT, M. (1969) : Guidance, Counselling and Social Needs - in Lytton and Craft (eds)

DAVIE, R., BUTLER, N. and GOLDSTEIN, H. (1972) : From Birth to Seven, Longman Educational Books for The National Children's Bureau, Harlow

DAVIS, K.C. (1971) : Discretionary Justice, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, Ill.

DENZIN, N.K. (1970) : The Research Act, McGraw Hill, New York, NY

DOUGLAS, J.B. (1976) : Investigative Social Research, Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, Cal.

DOUGLAS, J.W.B. and ROSS, J.M. (1968) : Adjustment and Educational Progress - in British Journal of Educational Psychology, 38, 1

DWORKIN, R. (1977) : Taking Rights Seriously, Duckworth, London

DURKHEIM, E. (1957) : Professional Ethics and Civil Morals, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London

EDUCATION (SCOTLAND) ACT, 1980

EGGLESTON, J. (1979) : The Construction of Deviance in the School - in Barton and Meighan (eds)

FARRINGTON, D. (1980) : Truancy, Delinquency, the Home and the School - in Herson and Berg (eds)

FAY, B. (1975) : Social Theory and Political Practice, George Allen and Unwin, London

FLETCHER, A. (1980) : Guidance in Schools, Aberdeen University Press, Aberdeen

FOGELMAN, K. and RICHARDSON, K. (1974) : School Attendance - in Turner (ed)

FOGELMAN, K. (1976) : Britain's Sixteen Year Olds, National Children's Bureau, London

FOGELMAN, K., TIBBENHAM, A. and LAMBERT, L. (1980) : Absence from School - in Herson and Berg (eds)

FREIDSON, E. (1970) : Profession of Medicine, Dodd Mead and Co, New York, NY

GAGNE, E. (1982) : School Behaviour and School Discipline, University Press of America, Washinton DC

GALLOWAY, D. (1976) : Size of school, socio economic hardship, suspension rates and persistent unjustified absence from school - in British Journal of Educational Psychology, 46, 1

GALLOWAY, D. (1982) : Schools and Disruptive Pupils, Longman Group, London

GALLOWAY, D. (1985) : Schools and Persistent Absentees, Pergamon Press, Oxford

GARLAND, D. (1981) : The Birth of the Welfare Sanction - in British Journal of Law and Society, 8, 1

GARLAND, D. and YOUNG, P. (1983) : The Power to Punish, Heinemann Educational Books, London

GILL, C.J. (1969) : Some Practical Issues - in Lytton and Craft (eds)

GILLER, H. and MORRIS, A. (1981) : Care and Discretion, Burnett Books, London

GILLHAM, B. (1981) : Problem Behaviour in the Secondary School, Croom Helm, London

GOODMAN, P. (1971) : Compulsory Miseducation, Penguin, Harmondsworth

GORDON WEST, W. (1979) : Adolescent Autonomy, Education and Pupil Deviance - in Barton and Meighan (eds)

GOW, L. and McPHERSON, A. (1980) : Tell Them From Me, Aberdeen University Press, Aberdeen

GRAY, J., McPHERSON, A.F. and RAFFE, D. (1983) : Reconstructions of Secondary Education, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London

GRAY, G., SMITH, A. and RUTTER, M. (1980) : School Attendance and the First Year of Employment, - in Herson and Berg (eds)

GREGORY, M. (1973) : The Right to Education - in Proceedings of the Philosophy of Education Society

of Great Britain, 7, 1

GRUNSELL, R. (1980) : Absent from School, Chameleon Books, London

GRUNSELL, R. (1980b) : Beyond Control?, Chameleon Books, London

HALL WILLIAMS, J.E. (1981) : Criminology and Criminal Justice, Butterworths, London

HARGREAVES, D.H. (1972) : Interpersonal Relationships in Education, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London

HARGREAVES, D.H. (1967) : Social Relations in Secondary Schools, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London

HARGREAVES, D.H., HESTOR, J. and MELLOR, S. (1975) : Deviance in Classrooms, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London

HER MAJESTY'S INSPECTORATE OF SCHOOLS (1978) : Truancy and Behaviour Problems in Some Urban Schools, Department of Education and Science, London

HERSOV, L. and BERG, I. (1980) : Out of School, Willey and Co, Chichester

HODGES, V. (1968) : Non-Attendance at School, - in Educational Research, 11,1

HOOD, R. and SPARKS, R. (1970) : Key Issues in Criminology, Weidesfeld and Nicolson, London

HUSEN, T. (1979) : The School in Question, Oxford University Press, Oxford

ILLICH, I. (1976) : Limits to Medicine, Boyars, London

ILLICH, I. (1972) : Deschooling Society, Penguin, Harmondsworth

JOHNSON, T.J. (1972) : Professions of Power, McMillan, London

JOHNSON, D., RANSOM, E., PACKWOOD, T., BOWDEN, K. and KOGAN, M. (1980) : Secondary Schools and the Welfare Network, Allen and Unwin, London

KAHN, J.H. and NURSTEN, J.P. (1964) : Unwillingly



to School, Pergamon Press, Oxford

KLEINIG, J. (1982) : Philosophical Issues in Education, Croom Helm, London

LAWRENCE, J., STEED, D. and YOUNG, P. (1984) : Disruptive Children, Disruptive Schools, Croom Helm, London

LEES, D. (1966) : The Economic Consequences of the Professions, Institute for Economic Affairs, London

LINDSAY, G. (1983) : Problems of Adolescence in the Secondary School, Croom Helm, London

LOTHIAN REGIONAL COUNCIL : School Attendance Committees Notes of Guidance, Department of Education, Edinburgh

LYTTON, H. and CRAFT, M. (1969) : Guidance and Counselling in British Schools, Edward Arnold, London

MCCORMACK, R. (1982) : Calling Education to Account, Open University, London

MACDONALD, R. (1973) : Guidance in a Scottish Comprehensive School - in Scottish Educational Studies, 5, 1

McKENZIE, R.F. (1967) : The Sins of the Children, Penguin, Harmondsworth

McKENZIE, R.F. (1970) : State School, Penguin Harmondsworth

MARLAND, M. (1982) : Parents, Schooling and the Welfare of Pupils, Mortimore and Blackstone, London

MARLAND, M. (1974) : Pastoral Care, Heinemann Educational Books, London

MARTIN, F.M., FOX, S.J. and MURRAY, K. (1981) : Children Out Of Court, Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh

MARTIN, F.M. and MURRAY, K. (1976) : Children's Hearings, Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh

MAY, D. (1975) : Truancy, School Absenteeism and Delinquency - in Scottish Educational Studies, 7, 2

- MAY, D. (1976) : Who are the truants? - in Times Educational Supplement, May
- MILLER, D. (1976) : Social Justice, Clarendon Press, Oxford
- MILLS, C.W. (1959) : The Sociological Imagination, Oxford University Press, London
- MOLLIS, J. (1982) : Education as a Political Good - in Journal of Philosophy of Education, 16, 2
- MOODY, S. and TOMBS, J. (1982) : Prosecution - in the Public Interest, Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh
- MOORE, B.M. (1970) : Guidance in Comprehensive Schools, National Foundation for Educational Research, Slough
- MORRIS, A., GILLER, H., SZWED, E and GEACH, H. (1980) : Justice for Children, McMillan and Co, London
- MORRIS, A. and McISAAC, M. (1978) : Juvenile Justice, Heinemann, London
- MORTIMORE, P. (1983) : Behaviour Problems in Schools, Croom Helm, London
- NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHIEF EWOS (1975) : Those We Save, NACE, London
- PACKER H.L. (1969) : The Limits of the Criminal Sanction, Stanford University Press, Stanford, Cal
- PARKER, H. (1979) : Social Work and the Courts, Edward Arnold, London
- POLLARD, A. (1979) : Negotiating Deviance and "getting done" in Primary School Classrooms - in Barton and Meighan (eds)
- PRATT, J.D. (1983) : Truancy and School Deviance - in Journal of Law and Society, 10, 2
- REID, I. (1978) : Sociological Perspectives on School and Education, Open Books, London
- REID, K. (1982) : The Self Concept and Persistent School Absenteeism - in British Journal of Educational Psychology, 52, 2
- REID, K. (1986) : Disaffection from School, Hodder and Stoughton, London
- REID, K. (1985) : Truancy and School Absenteeism,

Hodder and Stoughton, London

REIMER, E. (1971) : School is Dead, Penguin, Harmondsworth

REYNOLDS, D. (1976) : The Delinquent School - in Hammersley and Woods (eds)

REYNOLDS, D., JONES, D. and St LEGER, S. (1976) : Schools do make a difference - in New Society, 37, 321

REYNOLDS, D., JONES, D., St LEGER, S. and MURGATROYD, S. (1980) : School Factors in Truancy - in Hersov and Berg (eds)

REYNOLDS, D. and SULLIVAN, M. (1979) : Bringing Schools Back IN - in Barton and Meighan (eds)

RIBBINS, P. (1985) : Schooling and Welfare, Falmer Press, London

RICHMOND, W.K. : The Free School, Methuen, London

RUTTER, M., MAUGHAN, B., MORTIMORE, P., OUSTON, J. and SMITH, A. (1979) : Fifteen Thousand Hours, Open Books, London

RUTTER, M. and GILLER, H. (1984) : Juvenile Justice, Trends and Perspectives, Guilford Press, London

SCHUR, E.M. (1973) : Radical Non-Intervention, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ

SCOTTISH EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (1977) : Truancy and Indiscipline in Schools in Scotland (The Pack Report), HMSO, London

SHARP, R. (1980) : Knowledge, Ideology and the Politics of Schooling, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London

SHEPHERD, M., OPPENHEIM, B and MITCHELL, S. (1971) : Childhood Behaviour and Mental Health, University of London Press, London

SHIPMAN, M.D. (1968) : The Sociology of the School, Longman, London

SMITH, G. and MAY, D. (1978) : Executing "Decisions" in the Children's Hearings - paper presented at SSRC seminar, Exeter University, Sept

SOCIAL WORK (SCOTLAND) ACT, 1968

SPRADLEY, J.P. (1980) : Participant Observation, Holt, Reinhard and Winston, New York, NY

TAYLOR, I., WALTON, P. and YOUNG, J. (1973) : The New Criminology, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London

TAYLOR, I., WALTON, P. and YOUNG, J. (1975) : Critical Criminology, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London

THOMPSON, K. (1972) : Education and Philosophy, Basil Blackwood, Oxford

TIMMS, N. and WATSON, D. (1976) : Talking About Welfare, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London

TIMMS, N. and WATSON, D. (1978) : Philosophy in Social Work, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London

TITMUSS, R. (1971) : Welfare Rights, Law and Discretion - in Political Quarterly

TOPPING, K.J. (1983) : Educational Systems for Disruptive Adolescents, Croom Helm, London

TRIGG, J.E. (1973) : Focus on the Absent Minority - in Special Education, 62, 2

TURNER, B. (ed) (1973) : Discipline in Schools, Ward Lock Educational Books, London

TYERMAN, M.J. (1958) : A Research into Truancy - IN British Journal of Educational Psychology, 28, 3

TYERMAN, M.J. (1968) : Truancy, University of London Press, London

WADD, K. (1973) : Classroom Power - in Turner (ed)

WATSON, D. (1980) : Discretion, Moral Judgement and Integration - in Adler and Asquith (eds)

WATTS, J. (1973) : Tell me what to do and I'll do it - in Turner (ed)

WELTON, J. (1985) : Schools and a Multi-Professional Approach to Welfare - in Ribbins (ed)

WHITE, P. (1971) : Education, Democracy and the Public Interest - in Proceeding of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain, 5, 1

WHITE, R. (1980) : Absent With Cause, Routledge

and Kegan Paul, London

WILKINS, L.T. (1971) : The Deviance Amplifying System -  
in Carson and Wiles (eds)

WILLIAMS, P. (1974) : Behaviour Problems in Schools,  
University of London Press, London

WILLIS, P. (1978) : Learning to Labour, Saxon  
House, Farnborough

WOODS, P. (1979) : The Divided School, Routledge  
and Kegan Paul, London

WRIGHT, D. (1973) : The Punishment of Children -  
in Turner (ed)

WRINGE, C.P. (1981) : Childrens Rights, Routledge and  
Kegan Paul, London

WRINGE, C.P. (1973) : Pupils' Rights - in Proceedings  
of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain,  
7, 1

YOUNG, K. (1980) : Discretion as an Implementation  
Problem - in Adler and Asquith (eds)

YOUNG, M. (1971) : Knowledge and Control, Collier  
MacMillan, London

## I. APPENDIX 1 : THE QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire was administered to the Guidance staff, but was varied for each of the groups interviewed, to take account of the specific decisions they have to make.

### THE GUIDANCE STAFF

#### Details of School

1. What do you teach?
2. How long have you been in the school?
3. How would you describe the school in terms of its educational and social characteristics?
4. What proportion of the pupils in the school would you say become involved in the truancy procedures you have?
5. How is a truanting pupil referred to you?
6. What will have happened prior to this?
7. What do you would you generally do following such a referral?
8. What options do you have available to you?
9. Under what circumstances would you :
  - Instigate discussion with the pupils?
  - Invoke internal school measures (such as change of class or use of irregular attendance book?)
  - Issue a Pink Card and involve the E.W.O?
  - Refer the pupil to the Reporter?
10. What are the main factors you would take into consideration when making this decision?

#### General Attitude to School

11. What do you think is the overall purpose of schools?
12. Do you think education should be compulsory? (If yes, why? Why or why not?)
13. What do you think are the main strengths and weaknesses of the school system at present?
14. What sort of changes (if any) would you like to see?
15. Have there been any changes of this type made at individual school level?

### Attitude to the Causes of Truancy

16. What do you think causes pupils to truant?
17. What are the most usually given reasons?
18. Do you think the causes are home or school based?
19. Can you give examples of the types of factors which are important?
20. How do you think these could be alleviated?

### The Focus of Concern

21. How does the school as a whole deal with truancy from the outset (detection, isolation, internal measures, attendance cards, absence enquiries, discussions)?
22. Do you think truanting pupils cause the school any problems?
23. Do you think truanting pupils cause other pupils any problems? (What sort?)

### The Response

24. When dealing with truancy, what is the main thing you are trying to achieve?
25. What are the limits of what the school can do (if any)?
26. When do you think the E.W.O. should be involved?
27. How do you think the E.W. O. should approach the task?
28. What contact do you have with the E.W.O.?
29. What is the purpose of this?
30. Do you find it useful?
31. Do you ever go to Attendance Committees?
32. What form do these take?
33. At what stage do you think a Committee should be called?
34. What do you see as the main purpose of this?
35. How useful is the Attendance Committee?
36. What do you see as the role of the Reporter in truancy cases?
37. In what kind of cases would you see a Children's Hearing as appropriate?
38. What do you see as the role of the Procurator Fiscal in truancy cases?
39. In what kind of circumstances would this be appropriate?
40. How useful do you think each of these options is?

**Use of Discretion**

41. Do you think having a wide choice of courses of action is useful?  
(Why or why not?)
42. How do you think the pupils feel about this?
43. What are the benefits and drawbacks of having these alternatives?

**Overall Role**

44. How much opportunity do the pupils get to state their views?
45. How far do you think pupils should have a say in the educative process?
46. Are there any cases in which you feel truancy can be justified? (What sort?)
47. Does that influence how you deal with the pupil? (If so, how?)
48. In summary, what are the main aspects of a truancy case you would take into account when deciding how to proceed?
49. What contacts do you have with others involved in dealing with truanting pupils?
50. How useful are these?
51. What do you see as the main strengths and weaknesses of the present means of dealing with truancy?
52. Can you suggest an ideal way of reducing truancy?
53. Can you suggest an ideal way of dealing with truanting pupils?